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In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

January 20, 2003

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resegregation
of America's
public schools*

BY DAMIEN JACKSON

≈ Trent Lott's
Rebel Yell ≈

BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

≈ Indians in America
Fund the Hindu Right ≈

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In These Times (ISSN 0160-5992) is published biweekly by the Institute for Public Affairs, 2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60647. Periodicals postage paid at Chicago, IL and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *In These Times*, 308 E. Hitt St., Mt. Morris, IL 61054. This issue (Vol. 27, Nos. 4-5) went to press on December 20 for newsstand sales January 6 to 20, 2003.

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Subscriptions are \$36.95 a year (\$59 for institutions; \$61.95 Canada; \$75.95 overseas). For **subscription questions, address changes and back issues** call (800) 827-0270.

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Complete issues and volumes of *In These Times* are available from Bell and Howell, Ann Arbor, MI. *In These Times* is indexed in the Alternative Press Index and the Left Index. Newsstand circulation through the IPA International Sales Cooperative at (415) 643-0161, or info@bigtoppubs.com.

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Editorial

Rebel Yell

Mississippi Sen. Trent Lott's retroactive endorsement of Jim Crow apartheid, at Sen. Strom Thurmond's 100th birthday party on December 5, was a rebel yell in the wrong venue. His days are numbered as majority leader and, if he follows others who have lost congressional leadership posts, he may leave the Senate altogether.

Lott's gaffe was a gift to Democrats and others seeking to show how the cynical use of racism help build the modern GOP. Ever since Lyndon B. Johnson enlisted the Democratic Party in the civil rights movement in the mid-'60s, the Republicans have attempted to exploit the white backlash. Their success is manifest in the solidly GOP South.

Although many Democrats have been slow to exploit their windfall, former President Bill Clinton joined the fray. "How can they jump on him," Clinton asked in a December 18 speech, "when they're out there repressing, trying to run black voters away from the polls and running under the Confederate flag in Georgia and South Carolina?"

Lott must have felt blindsided. After all, he was there when the now-sainted Ronald Reagan began his 1980 presidential campaign in Philadelphia, Mississippi, the infamous place where civil rights workers Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman and James Chaney were slain in 1964, in one of the most horrific incidents of that turbulent era.

Reagan's decision to start his campaign in that tainted location was a symbolic embrace of segregationist forces. At the time, his challenge to the shaky civil rights consensus seemed a needless provocation. In retrospect, we can see that Reagan's unambiguous allegiance with the reactionary forces set the mold for future GOP strategies.

In fact, Reagan's wink at the segregationists was a continuation of the Republicans' "Southern strategy," a line of attack initiated by Richard Nixon in his 1968 presidential campaign. This strategy explicitly used blacks' quest for civil rights as an issue to scare whites into the ranks of the Republican Party.

It worked. The GOP's success in using race as a wedge is one of the primary reasons the old Confederacy now casts its lot with the party of Lincoln. By "racializing" the Democrats' "liberal agenda" and contrasting it with the traditional confederate call for "states rights," the GOP produced a major political realignment.

Lott's sin was revealing the unsavory motives behind that realignment. As Clinton says, "He just embarrassed them by saying in Washington what they do on the back roads every day."

Lott has made multiple apologies, but many conservatives have called for him to give up his leadership post. Although President Bush has not publicly asked Lott to step down, the White House clearly is concerned about the political damage he is causing Republicans. When Colin Powell weighed in against him, it was a clear signal that the White House wants him gone.

Republicans may benefit from not having Lott to kick around, but our nation suffers if he merely becomes a sacrificial lamb for the racial

Lott's exit will allow this country to pat itself on the back for condemning our racist past, as we ignore the racist present.

sins of the segregationist past. After all, Lott evoked an American apartheid that's not too far from our present reality. Just check the racial disparities in the indices of social misery, or the racial ratios of prison inmates or homeless shelters, and it's clear we have a long way to go to wipe out the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow.

These stark racial disparities are an embarrassment to a nation that claims to have left its racist past behind. Lott's rebel yell reminded us of all that. And as the leader of the Senate, he'd be a constant reminder. That's why he has to go.

His exit from leadership will allow this nation to pat itself on the back for condemning our racist past, as we continue to ignore the racial disparities that plague us still.

There may be progress here, but it's hard to see.

—Salim Muwakkil

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Anti-social Forum?

David Graeber falsely claims that when I spoke at the European Social Forum in Florence ("A Democratic Multitude," December 23, 2002), I denied that "there was ever something fundamentally new about the current movement" and insisted that "the core of the movement has always been established labor unions and political parties." This is nonsense. I attacked the idea that this movement, in all its genuine novelty and vitality, has no connection with past struggles against capitalism.

He complains that the Social Forum was dominated by "top-down" leftist organizations like Rifondazione Comunista and asserts that "the anarchists and most other actual practitioners of self-organization" were excluded from the event. You don't have to be an anarchist to practice grassroots democracy, and I didn't notice anyone being kept out of the event's cheerful chaos. Graeber's real beef with the Social Forum is that the overwhelmingly young and very radical participants were extremely receptive to representatives of the Marxist left who sought to draw connections between the movement against corporate globalization and the classical socialist project.

We Marxists certainly have much to learn, but we have something positive to offer. People like Graeber sense themselves getting left out of this interchange and so engage in silly abuse. Surely we can discuss our disagreements in a more mature and constructive way?

Alex Callinicos
London

David Graeber states that "the main Italian organizers of the event were political parties like the Greens and Rifondazione Comunista, along with the Disobédienti." This is not true. The Italian Social Forum, who organized the event, is a coalition of nearly 1,000 groups. Moreover, the Disobédienti, though part of the ISF, did not participate fully in the Forum, instead choosing to do a number of direct actions and occupations.

No one was exiled to the margins, as he claims. Many events happened all over Florence, simply because there wasn't space for everything in the Fortress. And to claim anarchists have a monopoly on self-organization is absurd when the Social Forum was movement-organized—about 1,000 volunteers worked day and night, and a raft of translators made sure everyone could understand each other—and movement-funded.

The Social Forum was not perfect, but it was a tremendous success. It's a shame that

Graeber lets his own rather sectarian political stance color his piece.

Noel Douglas
London

David Graeber replies: *If Alex Callinicos didn't say that, I'm delighted to hear it. I agree that the movement builds on the Marxist past, but I would hope it would also avoid past failures. These letters are a bit worrisome in that regard.*

It seems very disingenuous, for instance, to say that the audience was not receptive to an anarchist message, when almost no anarchists got a chance to speak. I have no idea exactly who attended those tiny little secret committees I kept hearing about, or even if they really existed (though I heard some pretty scary reports). But even if they didn't happen, doesn't it bother these people that so many people think they did?

I spent two-thirds of my essay celebrating the success of the forum, and ended on a note of caution—warning of a growing rift between groups like Rifondazione and the Disobédienti (whom I have praised elsewhere), and those groups emphasizing direct action and organized by principles of direct democracy.

For the record, I don't think anyone, including the Italian anarchists, is entirely blameless here. I ended with a plea for more democracy and solidarity—since, after all, the power of this movement has always rested in an alliance between both. In response, I am told that I'm sectarian and greeted with Callinicos gloating that his side is winning. Perhaps the danger is worse than I had thought!

Correction

"Explosive Revelation\$" by Lucy Komisar (April 15, 2002) incorrectly stated that SBA bank in Paris "is controlled by Khaled bin Mahfouz." That misinformation came from a French parliamentary report. The bank is not controlled by bin Mahfouz, whose younger sister is married to Osama bin Laden. The Mahfouz family, however, is a major Saudi banking family, and Mahfouz's cousin is a shareholder of SBA bank. We regret the error.

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Please, please, please return the card we mailed to you recently. Whether you send a donation or not, returning the card will allow *In These Times* to publicly thank you in our 26th anniversary issue.

...and Chicago Readers

That issue, appearing in January, will feature stories related to *Illegal Art: Freedom of Expression in the Corporate Age*, an exhibit of film/video, visual and sound artists challenging current intellectual property laws. *In These Times* is excited to bring this exhibit to its offices in Chicago in January. See page 28 for more information or visit www.inthesetimes.com, and come to the opening reception January 25, 6 to 9 p.m.

When the show opened in November in New York, the *New York Times* reported: "For artists and art-lovers, this is probably the most thought-provoking event to attend this year."

Terry LaBan



TRENT'S NEW FRIENDS

Funding Terror

Investigating the role of Saudi banks

By Lucy Komisar

Having a quarter of the world's oil reserves may mean never having to say you're sorry to Washington. Instead, when *Newsweek* reported in December that checks from the wife of the Saudi ambassador to the United States had been sent to associates of two of the September 11 hijackers, Saudi and Washington officials revved up their spin machines.

When the reports surfaced, Haifa bint Faisal, wife of Saudi ambassador Bandar bin Sultan, acknowledged that she sent nearly \$150,000 to the wife of a Saudi living in San Diego. The recipient, Majeda Ibrahim Dweikat, signed over some of the checks to a friend whose husband, Omar al-Bayoumi (with Dweikat's husband), helped hijackers Khalid Almidhar and Nawaf Alhazmi find housing in San Diego, open bank accounts, get Social Security cards, pay expenses and arrange flying lessons in Florida.

U.S. authorities suspected days after September 11 that al-Bayoumi, by then in Birmingham, England, had helped the hijackers. The British arrested him and, in a search of his house, found phone records showing calls to two diplomats at the Saudi Embassy in Washington. Lacking conclusive evidence, they released him, and he is now believed back in Saudi Arabia.

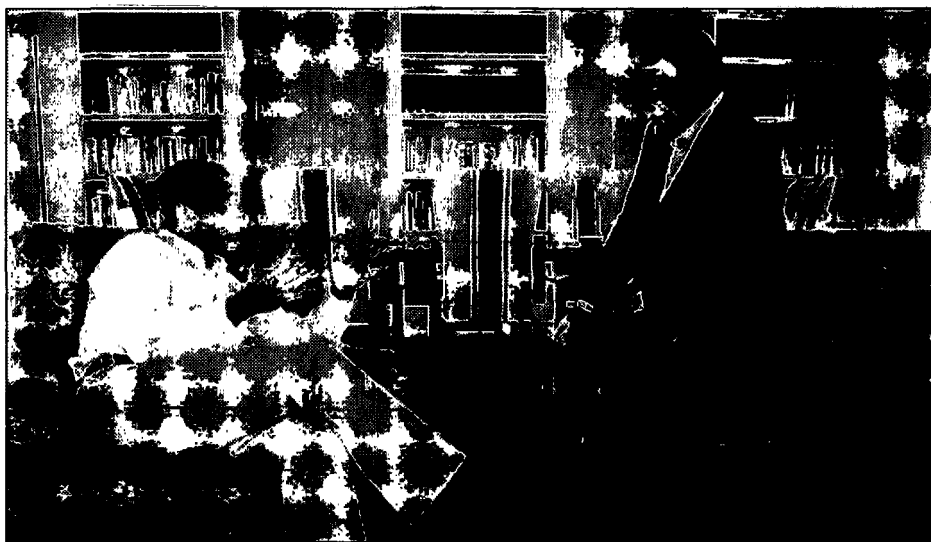
U.S. authorities continued to investigate his connections. FBI spokesman Ed Cogswell told *In These Times* that the bureau had discovered the bint Faisal money transfers when it examined al-Bayoumi's accounts. (Records would have included the check endorsed to al-Bayoumi's wife.) Bint Faisal insists she did not knowingly aid the terrorists—that she did not even know the woman—but was only giving charity to Dweikat, a thyroid patient, whose husband had written seeking funds to pay medical bills.

Yet the revelation again raises questions about U.S. policy, which has consistently supported the Saudi oil monarchy in spite of its refusal to cooperate with the United States in investigations of terrorist attacks against Americans.

The links between bint Faisal's powerful Saudi family and financing of terrorism are even more extensive, however. The trails of both Omar al-Bayoumi, the man who aided the hijackers, and that of the financial network of bint Faisal's family each lead to Osama bin Laden.

According to a 1996 U.S. State Department report, al-Shamal Islamic Bank in Khartoum, Sudan, was capitalized by bin Laden and wealthy members of Sudan's National Islamic Front. Bin Laden invested \$50 million in the bank. Mohammed al-

Mohammed Al-Faisal is president of Dar al-Mal al-Islami (DMI), the House of Finance of Islam. This Geneva-based bank is charged with distributing subsidies of the royal family in the Muslim world. DMI, founded in 1981 and with assets of an estimated \$3.5 billion, also has connections to the bin Laden family: Its 12-member board of directors includes Haydar Mohamed bin Laden, Osama bin Laden's half-brother, and Khalid bin Mahfouz, whose sister Kaleda is one of Osama bin Laden's wives. (Bin Mahfouz was indicted by the United States in



President Bush and Saudi ambassador to the U.S. Bandar bin Sultan discuss PR strategy in Texas.

Faisal, bint Faisal's brother, is an investor and board member at al-Shamal.

Al-Shamal appears to have been a bin Laden bank of choice. Al-Qaeda members had accounts in al-Shamal, according to testimony during U.S. trials surrounding the 1998 attacks on American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. One al-Qaeda collaborator, Essam al-Ridi, recounted how bin Laden transferred \$230,000 from al-Shamal to a bank in Arizona to buy a plane to fly Stinger missiles from Pakistan to Sudan.

One of the bank's three founding members and major shareholders is Saleh Abdullah Kamel. A major financial and media power in the Arab world, he is in addition the chairman of the Dallah al-Baraka Group (DBG). Al-Bayoumi was assistant to the Director of Finance for Dallah Avco, a DBG company that works with the Saudi aviation authority. The *Wall Street Journal* has reported that the United States believes the Dallah al-Baraka Bank, another DBG company, was also used by al-Qaeda.

the notorious BCCI banking scandal, which defrauded depositors of \$9 billion, and in 1995 paid a \$225-million fine.)

DMI and al-Shamal are not the only banks that link al-Faisal to Osama bin Laden. Al-Faisal's DMI is also a major shareholder of al-Taqwa, the bank registered in the Bahamas and based in Switzerland that was shut down last November after Washington blacklisted it as a centerpiece of bin Laden's financial network. The United States has not, however, blacklisted al-Shamal.

These banking connections are compounded by long-standing questions about the function of some Saudi charities. At a December press conference in Washington, Saudi adviser Adel al-Jubeir said, "We have not found a direct link or support from the Saudi charities to terrorist groups."

Despite al-Jubeir's claims, one major Saudi charity—the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO), which directs millions of dollars a year to fundamentalist

movements—has strong connections to bin Laden. A 1999 Jordanian intelligence report, obtained by *In These Times*, said that Islamic Relief, “used by bin Laden’s men,” was active in the Balkans, Chechnya, Azerbaijan and Kashmir.

In September 2001, after the terrorist attacks in the United States, Britain’s Charity Commission took the IIRO off its list of registered charities on grounds it did not function as one. It is not, however, on the U.S. terrorist blacklist.

The administration treads gingerly in targeting institutions that could lead to the Saudi royals and influentials. In December, Sens. Bob Graham (D-Florida) and Richard C. Shelby (R-Alabama) accused the Bush administration of refusing to declassify information that showed possible Saudi Arabian financial links to terrorists because it didn’t want to embarrass the Saudis and endanger its political ties. Shelby, sworn not to reveal classified material, said the information could involve “a lot of their leaders and probably even the royal family.” ■

Middle-class Revolt

Venezuelan elites go on strike

By Steve Ellner

CARACAS, VENEZUELA—At first glance, the general strike in Venezuela stands Marx on his head. On December 2, the powerful Confederation of Workers (CTV) and the business organization Fedecámaras stopped work, calling for either the ouster of “revolutionary” President Hugo Chávez or immediate new presidential elections.

By December 6, merchant marine captains had also stopped work, choking Venezuela’s oil exports, the lifeline of the economy, by anchoring 13 oil tankers at sea (they were joined by two dozen more in the following days). The Association of Pilots closed down Aserca, one of Venezuela’s two major airlines. And while Fedepetrol, the oil workers union, opposed the strike, the managerial ranks

at the state oil company, attempted to paralyze operations. As Venezuelan oil production plunged by 70 percent, international prices surpassed \$28 a barrel, OPEC’s proposed maximum price.

As the conflict entered its second week, the general strike ceased to be the key issue. A small number of strategically located employees had transformed the conflict into a fight for control of the economy, particularly oil and gas production. Congressman Rafael Simón Jiménez, an independent, puts it this way: “This strike is no longer ‘democratic,’ in the sense that it no longer matters whether a majority of workers support it.”

Following Chávez’s election in December 1998, reforms have strongly favored labor at the expense of business, from agrarian reform to severance benefits. Fedecámaras, an organization of business interests that since its founding in 1944 had always refrained from political activism, now has moved steadily toward vocal opposition.

The process culminated in April, when the group, aided by CTV leaders (irked by Chávez efforts to displace them with his own union supporters), fostered a movement that ousted the President for 48 hours. The December 2 general strike is the fourth jointly called by the two organizations in a year.

On December 7, at a rally estimated by pro-government sources to be in the hundreds of thousands, Chávez called on his followers to maintain an ongoing presence on the streets. “The hour has arrived to wage the great battle for oil,” he said. “Oil belongs to the entire nation, not just an elite.”

Chávez then decreed an emergency reorganization of the industry, firing four top executives who had engineered the stoppage and arresting several of the striking oil tanker captains.

Venezuelans’s reaction to the strike has been largely determined by class—much as Marx would have predicted. While downtown and poorer neighborhoods have quickly returned to normality, affluent areas of major cities avidly support the strike, banging pots and pans every day after 8 p.m.

On December 10, the opposition called for the conflict’s transformation into an “active strike,” meaning street mobilizations. Shortly thereafter, the entrances of oil refineries were the unlikely scenes of

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by TOM TOMORROW

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middle-class protesters obstructing the arrival of workers, in some cases calling them "strikebreakers." The slogans of anti-government protesters have been directed exclusively at Chávez, calling him an "assassin" and even "Satan," with frequent references to his friendship with Fidel Castro. On the other hand, Chávista leaders characterized the strike as a "lockout."

Venezuela may be on the verge of widespread violence. On December 6, three people were killed at an anti-Chávez demonstration. As political tension has reached a crescendo, class and even racial animosities have come to the fore (reflecting the prejudices of an elite that is lighter-skinned than those at the bottom). In an editorial it subsequently apologized for, the nation's premier newspaper, *El Nacional*, called Chávez's supporters "lumpen," adding that they were prodded to take to the streets by a bottle of rum.

Although Chávez's enemies seem overwhelming, he is in a stronger position than in April. As a result of that coup, Chávez identified and isolated his adversaries within the armed forces and consolidated his military support.

Another change favoring Chávez is Washington's new posture. President Bush justified the April coup, and newspaper reports at the time documented the U.S. bankrolling of opposition groups. The recent exit of Otto Reich as provisional assistant secretary of state, whom Vice President José Vicente Rangel on different occasions has called a "liar," a "clown" and a "provocateur," may help improve relations. The Venezuelan opposition now openly criticizes U.S. ambassador Charles Shapiro for maintaining a distance from the impasse.

A comment made by Bush Press Secretary Ari Fleischer on December 13 supporting immediate elections in Venezuela was retracted days later, thus committing Washington even more to strict neutrality. As Washington prepares for armed conflict in Iraq, its interest in stable oil prices and production overshadows all other concerns.

But the United States has another reason for staying neutral, namely the depth of political and social hostilities in Venezuela. Overt support for either side will not be forgiven or forgotten for years to come. Indeed, the social tensions in Venezuela will not easily fade, whichever side emerges victorious in the short run. ■

Winds of Change?

As Israeli opinion shifts, despair is a constant

By Charmaine Seitz

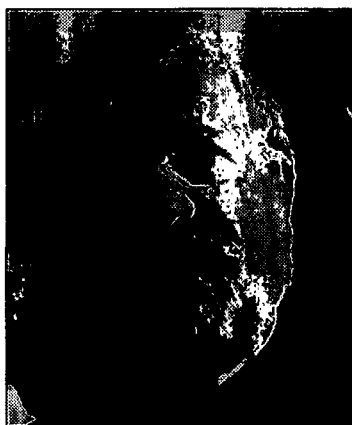
Israeli history has shown that the course of national politics can do an about-face in 24 hours. The current election run-up for a January 28 vote is proving no different.

The candidates of the two major parties are sitting Prime Minister Ariel Sharon for the center-right Likud Party and former general and Haifa Mayor Amram Mitzna for left-of-center Labor. According to an early December poll by the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz*, the Likud list was expected to take the premiership and almost double its seats in the Knesset, the Israeli legislature.

The Labor Party, on the other hand, is struggling to make over a leftist platform in a time when most Israelis have lost hope in the prospect of peace with Palestinians. After more than a year of working hand-in-hand with Likud in a coalition government, Labor's Mitzna is now hard-pressed to distinguish his party from Sharon's.

Mitzna is best known in Israel for his controversial 1982 letter to then Prime Minister Menachem Begin outlining his reasons for resigning from the army to protest the Lebanon war. "He was one of only two officers in the army who protested this venture," recalls far-left activist Uri Avnery, who reported extensively and critically on the Lebanon war. Later, Mitzna regained his hawk credentials at the head of the West Bank's military government during the first Palestinian uprising.

Today, the Labor Party leader is toeing a line that calls for negotiations with Palestinians, but also pledges: "If you continue with terror, we will beat you to a pulp." He has dovishly promised to withdrawal unilaterally from Gaza within a year, but his own party list is so stacked with more moderate voices that some analysts wonder if declarations like these go far enough in answering the Israeli public's widespread lack of hope for peace. "People desperately want a solution, but were convinced by [former Prime Minister] Ehud Barak that Palestinians do not want peace," Avnery says. "The country is waiting for leadership. It is steeped in despair and fatalism and deepening economic and social depression."



DAVID SILVERMAN / GETTY

Amram Mitzna, Israel Labor Party candidate for prime minister.

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But days after the *Ha'aretz* poll showed the right wing leading the way, allegations of vote-buying in the Likud primaries began to bleed the party's support. First-hand accounts of requests for money in exchange for votes have spurred a police investigation that may implicate one of Israel's crime families and even Sharon's own son. While Sharon has promised to expel wrongdoers from the party, the scandal has tainted Likud in the eyes of voters.

To the right of Sharon are a host of politicians who preach expulsion of Palestinians, and the current prime minister knows that if he wins too many votes, he will be forced to craft a far-right coalition that will be subject to the whims of his radical partners and be wide open for criticism from the United States. Instead, Sharon wants once again to join hands with Labor in another "unity government"—a plan supported by most Israelis. Whether a weak Labor can resist the pull of insider influence, choosing instead to remain in the opposition and rebuild its platform, remains to be seen.

The Palestinian leadership, while championing the bit to support Mitzna and bring about some thaw in bilateral relations, cannot tread too heavily without spurring a backlash against its perceived allies. Instead, Palestinian officials are working in concert with the European Union to get their armed opposition—groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad—to stay attacks on civilians inside Israel, attacks that could feed the desire for war.

That active engagement means little for the Palestinian public, who are largely indifferent to either Israeli candidate. In an odd parallel in despair, 75 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza told pollsters last week that they don't think peace relies on either candidate. "Mitzna articulates his program as 'Gaza without settlements,'" notes refugee rights advocate Sari Hanafi. "It is not surprising that this message has not captured the imagination of Palestinians."

Finally, in just one more bizarre twist in the election free-for-all, the Israeli attorney general in mid-December threatened to disqualify one of the six parties representing Israel's 1 million Palestinian citi-

zens on the basis of a 1985 election law that bans parties whose "objects or actions, expressly or by implication, include ... negation of the existence of the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people."

Knesset member Azmi Bishara has already been stripped of his parliamentary immunity to stand trial for allegedly making inciteful comments supporting the right of Palestinians to resist occupation. Bishara has responded to the threat of being blacklisted by accusing Israel's attorney general of acting as "a tool in the hand of the extremist right."

Ariel Sharon, by calling for a Palestinian state one day but acting to shore up settlement construction the next, is playing straight to the ambivalent heart of the country. "That's the absurdity of our political life—empty talk has turned Sharon into 'a leftist' in the Likud," writes journalist Amira Hass in disgust. "In other words, we've reached the stage where someone who doesn't explicitly preach expulsion or transfer of the Palestinians out of the country or perpetuation of the military regime over them is a 'leftist.'" ■

No Routine Expedition 4.4

David Cox is not a performance artist, but if he were, he'd deserve high marks for the spectacle he created recently along Highway 60 in Wisconsin. Cox's piece, a collaboration with 80 firefighters from 13 different departments, cast into high relief contemporary Americans' vehicular self-absorption, problematizing notions of leisure, identity and agency.

According to the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, sometime after Cox left the town of Cedarburg in a green 2000 Ford Expedition, the vehicle began belching hot metal and fiery fragments from a disintegrating catalytic converter. At times, spectators reported, flames were emitted from the tailpipe. The fiery SUV began to ignite dry grass in ditches along the way, creating fires that were carried by

gusting winds into fields around Cedarburg and neighboring Jackson. In all, some 20 acres of land burned as Cox drove on.

Finally, 40 miles into his journey, Cox brought his escapade to its dramatic conclusion. Noticing smoke and flames in the rear of the passenger compartment, the 73-year-old driver pulled over. By the time sheriff's deputies arrived on the scene, the Expedition was a pyre.

Checking Outing 3.9

Charles Alger is suing orthopedic surgeon David Arndt, Reuters reports, because Arndt started a spinal fusion operation and then left the patient with an open incision for more than half an hour while he ran out to the bank to cash his paycheck. Arndt explained that he had some overdue bills. His work on Alger was

taking too long, and he began to worry about getting to the bank before it closed.

Unwarranted 6.5

Conservatives, especially ones in the Deep South, have always been great fans of the 14th Amendment. So it is natural that Georgia legislators would want to extend the rights of due process to the unborn. Rep. Bobby Franklin of Marietta will introduce a bill in the state's next legislative session that will require any woman who seeks an abortion to first obtain a death warrant, just as correctional

authorities must do for a criminal about to be executed.

According to *WorldNetDaily.com*, the bill also provides a guardian for the unborn child who could demand a jury trial to weigh the fetus' rights against those of the pregnant woman. The bill threatens doctors with five years in prison if they perform an abortion without a death warrant, but no sanction against women who have the procedure.



Caught Speeding Volkswagen forces Czech workers to slow production

By Tony Wesolowsky

MLADA BLES LAV, CZECH REPUBLIC—Czech car manufacturer Skoda has long been held up as the shining example of the wonders foreign investment can work in the former Communist countries of Eastern Europe.

Bought out by the German auto giant Volkswagen after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Skoda used its infusion of German capital and know-how to churn out cheap, stylish cars, replacing not only the clunkers that cluttered roadways in Eastern Europe, but finding a niche further west. The company's top executive talked of someday taking on Volvo and English luxury car maker Rover.

But Volkswagen, Europe's biggest car maker, wants Skoda to put the brakes on such plans. It seems the Germans are not too pleased that some of Skoda's models are outselling their own creations. Instead of the lucrative luxury car business, Volkswagen wants Skoda to focus on churning out cheaper cars for Eastern Europe.

Foreign investment was the medicine that was supposed to make countries in Eastern and Central Europe prosperous—and capitalist. Foreign companies have plowed money into the region, creating jobs and opportunities. Now workers at Skoda are learning foreign capital can leave a bad aftertaste.

The workers at Skoda, fearing the German *diktat* will lead to layoffs, staged a brief walkout at the end of October. Blowing whistles and waving trade union flags, they chanted, "We're cheap, but not stupid."

Cheap labor was a big part of what lured Volkswagen to Skoda. At about \$600 a month, Skoda autoworkers are among the highest-paid manual laborers in all of East-

ern Europe. Princely for the Czechs, the wages were a bargain for Volkswagen, which pays its German workers nearly 10 times as much in total compensation. Besides low wages, the Germans got a raft of tax breaks from the Czechs to sweeten the deal.

For years, Skoda was cruising in the fast lane, alone accounting for 10 percent of all Czech exports. But it hit a pothole as the world economy started to sputter. Sales are down 6 percent this year, and a new, higher-end model, the Superb, introduced last year to inject new life at Skoda, is being scaled back. "It's a great disappointment for all of us," says auto



SEAN GALLUP/GETTY

What happens when foreign investment fails?

union leader Jaroslav Povsik. "We expected the Superb to do well mainly on the German market, but that would probably mean competition with the Volkswagen Passat. The doors are closed for us in Germany."

With the German government owning a 20 percent stake in Volkswagen, economics took a backseat to politics in the German automaker's decision, explains Kalman Kalotay, an analyst at the U.N. Conference on Trade and Development. "They know if Skoda takes more share of the market in Europe, that will mean less jobs [in Germany]," Kalotay says, "and that could mean German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder may be out of a job."

Far too many Eastern European countries have become too dependent on foreign investment and are not doing enough to prop up domestic firms, says

Slavo Radosevic, a professor at University College London who specializes in Eastern European privatization.

In Hungary, Radosevic points out, about 85 percent of industry is in foreign hands. He says Hungarian officials were given a rude wakeup call in April when IBM ended production of hard-disk drives at its plant in Szekesfehervar, about 40 miles southwest of Budapest, after inking a deal with Hitachi to produce them in China. Some 4,000 Hungarians lost their jobs.

Hungary has been burned by foreign investment before. When General Electric bought the electrical company Tungsram in

the early '90s, it closed down the company's production of vacuum equipment, electronic components, floppy disks and magnetic tape products, all of which were considered profitable. The Hungarian cement industry was bought by foreign owners who then prevented their Hungarian affiliates from exporting; and an Austrian steel producer bought a major Hungarian steel plant only to close it down—capturing its ex-Soviet market for the Austrian company.

Skoda is no stranger to the workings of corporate capitalism. In 1993, Skoda was Volkswagen's best seller at a time when the company was racking up losses of \$1.5 billion worldwide. Skoda had to share the pain, and production at Mlada

Boleslav was scaled back.

Another Czech company caught on quickly to the predatory nature of multinationals. CKD Tatra, a manufacturer of trolleys, was mulling a "partnership" with Germany's AEG in 1993. But the talks quickly broke off. At the time, CKD spokesman Vaclav Brom told the *Financial Times*, "Many foreign companies came to the Czech Republic with one aim: to ... control the business, cancel R&D and transfer research work to themselves and to use us as cheap labor."

Back at Mlada Boleslav, autoworkers at Skoda are also catching on. Union leader Jaromir Cvrcek says they have learned a lesson about the workings of capitalism, and some feel betrayed. "We were always told that Skoda Auto would never produce cheap cars," Cvrcek says. "Now, everything has changed." ■

BY THOMAS P. HEALY

Gulf War Legacy

Maj. Doug Rokke is "hot." No, he's not sweating. Nor is his physique the object of admiration. He's "hot" because his body is contaminated by uranium—specifically, "depleted uranium" (DU), which was widely used in munitions during the Gulf War as well as in Bosnia. DU is also expected to be deployed in the event of military action in Iraq.

"I was excreting over 1,200 micrograms a day, and [the U.S. Army] never even told me for two and a half years," Rokke says. According to Army regulations, any uranium excretion over 250 micrograms a day warrants immediate medical care.

Rokke is a Vietnam and Gulf War combat veteran who has specialized in hazardous materials and emergency medicine for more than 20 years. During Operation Desert Storm, he was part of a team that established decontamination procedures and facilities for nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. Later, he was given the mandate to clean up depleted uranium contamination in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

But the exposure came at great cost. DU—or more specifically, the radioactive isotope uranium 238—is a byproduct of the uranium enrichment process used to create reactor fuel and bombs. It was first used in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. In the Gulf War, Rokke says, it was widely used for its effectiveness in penetrating armor and strengthening armor against penetration.

Since then, more than 100,000 Gulf War veterans have reported unexplained illness, in a phenomenon sometimes known as Gulf War Syndrome. DU is a highly toxic heavy metal, and some studies have linked exposure to increased rates of cancer and birth defects.

"We have willfully spread it all over the place," Rokke says. "We've refused to clean up the mess; we've refused to provide medical care; not only to the American 'friendly fire' casualties who survived, but also to the DU cleanup teams; and we've refused to supply medical care to all the thousands and thousands of other people, including women and children—which makes it an indiscriminate weapon."

Indiscriminate weapons are banned by international law. The United Nations has issued

several calls for a ban on DU, which the United States has rejected. "When you leave all the contamination there," Rokke says of the Gulf War, "people are going to continue to get sick from just the uranium munitions alone—much less all of the millions of rounds of [unused] uranium 238 that we just left there."

Scientific studies on DU downplay hazards, and the military denies it has any harmful effects at all. In 1999, the Department of Defense hired the Rand Corporation to review the existing medical literature surrounding the effects of DU. Though it said more studies were needed, Rand reported that U.S. troops were unlikely to suffer ill effects from exposure to DU during their Gulf War tours.

But Rokke is convinced the Army is aware of the dangers of DU exposure. A March, 1991 memo from New Mexico's Los Alamos National Laboratory notes "concern regarding the impact of DU on the environment." The memo warns that without support for DU, "we stand to lose a valuable combat capability."

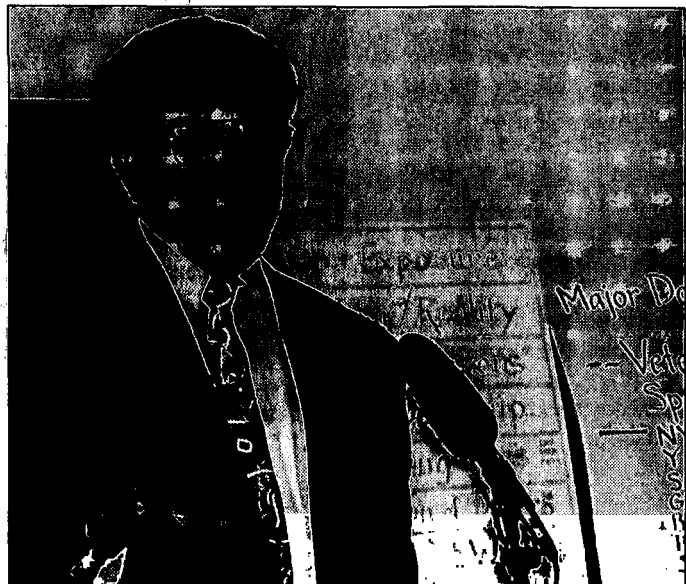
In 1992, Rokke co-authored a "theater cleanup plan" outlining the hazards of DU and making recommendations for remediation of the estimated 315 tons of DU fired during the Gulf War. "The plan went up through the military chain of command and was given to the Secretary of State and sent over to the emirate of Kuwait," he says. He's still waiting for the cleanup to start. "It's just not been done."

"The army knows it's a problem, and they just don't care," Rokke says. "They're going to use DU. You have to understand that. The purpose is to kill. When you go to war, you use the best weapon you have, and you will not ever give it up."

Based in part on the DU assessment reports Rokke and his team filed after the

Gulf War, the Defense Department released a directive on August 14, 1993, to: "1. Provide adequate training for personnel who may come in contact with depleted uranium equipment. 2. Complete medical testing of personnel exposed to DU contamination during the Persian Gulf War. 3. Develop a plan for DU contaminated equipment recovery during future operations."

Rokke says none of this has been done either. He just wishes the military would acknowledge the consequences of its actions. He's in good company. Both the Military Toxics Project and the National Gulf War Resource



Maj. Doug Rokke

Center are calling for the United States to exercise leadership and ban DU. International concerns are also growing, since England, China and 12 other nations have arsenals of depleted uranium. A 17-member international team of scientists working with the U.N. Environmental Program is currently examining the effects of DU in Bosnia. The commission is expected to issue a report in March.

For the past decade, Rokke has taken his message, both independently and as an Army officer, to veterans' groups, peace organizations and even Capitol Hill. His message is blunt: "I learned that real effective cleanup of this stuff is impossible. We need to ban DU." ■

Navel-Gazing News

By Susan J. Douglas

Can the network news be saved, or is it really too late? Conservatives and progressives argue over whether the news is biased toward the left or the right, but the most important and corrosive bias (aside from corporatism) is narcissism bias. The networks have apparently ascertained that Americans are most interested in their bodies and themselves, so that's what their news divisions report about. The Arab streets? Who cares about that when you can watch an "extreme makeover"?

Back in the '70s, sociologist Herbert Gans noted the extent to which ethnocentrism influenced the news; the United States was always presumed to be the center of the universe—its values, customs and attitudes those by which every other society should be judged. Today, except for rampaging weather systems and the very briefest nod to national politics, viewers aren't even asked to focus on their own country. Instead, they are urged to gaze at their navels.

On October 9, for example, as Congress debated giving President Bush authority to initiate war against Iraq, ABC News provided no coverage of the debate, no soundbites of the positions taken by different politicians. Instead, it ran a long segment on the wonders of yoga. Other recent hard-hitting pieces have focused on the merits of walking, healthy people who go to the doctor too frequently and promos, posing as news items, for upcoming Diane Sawyer interviews with self-absorbed, drug-prone celebrities.

So some viewers may have been surprised when, on December 16, ABC ran a highly self-satisfied piece chiding the British news media for its preoccupation with scandal and fluff. Poor Tony Blair struggled to get coverage of his meeting and joint press conference with the president of Syria: Nine stories, including those about Princess Diana's former butler and Blair's own wife struggling with her media image, got priority over this international news story. Tsk, tsk.

One suspects that this pot-calling-the-kettle-black form of journalism is the latest defensive response to the escalating criticisms of, and defections from, network

news. The network news used to constitute appointment viewing in our home, despite its infuriations. No more. We watch to see what the lead story is and then go have dinner rather than endure the endless "news you can use" stories about personal health and fitness. The average audience for each of the networks has dropped in the past several years from about 11 million each night to about 8 million.



Two new and important books document the news media's ongoing decline in standards and service, the immediate aftermath of September 11 partially excepted. *The News About the News: American Journalism in Peril* is written by Leonard Downie, Jr., the executive editor of the *Washington Post*, and Robert G. Kaiser, an associate editor at the paper, hardly radical media critics.

To drive home how the move toward conglomeration in the media industries has led to entertainment values dominating, and undermining, the news, Downie and Kaiser corralled Dan Rather, Tom Brokaw and Peter Jennings, and showed them broadcasts from the early '80s, when each man had just become his network's anchor. All were taken aback by how much international news was in the older broadcast, often leading the roster of stories. Each man admitted that no such broadcast could be put on today.

The collective wisdom at the networks is that Americans want stories about baldness remedies and pet massage, and the networks intend to make us happy. NBC often airs two medical features per broadcast. ABC, Peter Jennings noted, has slashed the number of foreign corre-

spondents and substitutes international news with stories about health and personal finance.

In *The Press Effect* by Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Paul Waldman, both from the Annenberg School of Communication, where Jamieson is the dean, the authors remind us of the lazy and sloppy news coverage of the 2000 election and, most timely now, of the Gulf War.

They revisit how an unverified and highly emotional account of Iraqi soldiers pulling babies out of incubators in a Kuwaiti hospital and throwing them on the cold floor, orchestrated by the public relations firm Hill & Knowlton, was used by Bush I to shift attention away from U.S. oil interests as a war motivator, and toward the analogy that Saddam Hussein was the reincarnation of Hitler. They show that the much-lauded Patriot missiles, on whose nose cones viewers were invited to sit from the comfort of their living rooms, usually missed their targets, a pesky fact underreported at the time.

How much better will the news do this time, when censorship will be heavy, and viewers back home will be given a magnifying mirror to look at themselves instead of a larger window to look outside?

Downie and Kaiser assert that the move toward infotainment isn't working and may actually be unprofitable in the long

Narcissism bias encourages political withdrawal and serves the current administration all too well.

run. (They note that the *Post* and the *New York Times*, for example, are doing well financially while CBS News and the *Miami Herald*, which have declined in quality, have lost a greater share of their audience.) This may be wishful thinking on their (and our) part, but the media activism movement should include an explicit rebuke of the narcissism bias. The narcissism bias encourages political withdrawal and apathy—actions, or rather inactions, that serve the current administration all too well.

The narcissism bias is what made the country so unprepared for, and clueless about, 9/11 in the first place. ■

Pee First, Ask Questions Later

By Peter Cassidy

In the past decade, a veritable *Kindergulag* has been erected around schoolchildren, making them subject to arbitrary curfews, physical searches, psychological profiling schemes and—in the latest institutionalized indignity—random, suspicion-less, warrant-less drug testing for just about any kid who wants to pursue extracurricular interests.

Last summer, the Supreme Court gave *carte blanche* to school districts that want to impose drug testing on kids who've cast suspicion upon themselves by volunteering for extracurricular activities. The 5-to-4 decision on June 27 upheld a drug-testing program in a Tecumseh County, Oklahoma, school district that requires students engaged in any "competitive" extracurricular activities to submit to random drug testing.

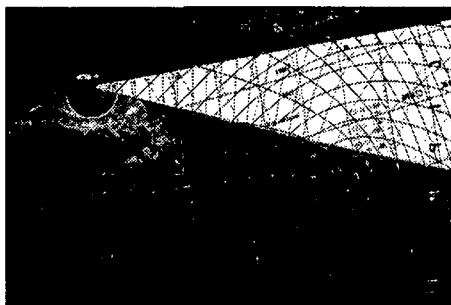
This isn't just about keeping jocks from enjoying a post-practice beer or joint. The decision approves the testing of any student who volunteers for the Future Farmers of America, Future Homemakers of America, the cheerleading squad, the choir, the color guard or even those sacrosanct curators of Sousa, the marching band.

There is understandably a good deal of sympathy for drug testing as a social safety mechanism to catch kids who might be heading toward life-destroying drug abuse, social isolation and crime. Who doesn't want to catch a kid before he takes a life-long fall? Yet before parents surrender their kids to the arms of the therapeutic enforcement state, they need to come to terms with the provenance of the interventions they are tacitly endorsing for their kids—and some of the more enduring shared consequences of drug testing.

Drug testing actually arrived in American schools by way of the armed forces and the prison system. The Navy began testing servicemen for drugs 30 years ago, when the first test kits were developed. By the late '70s, prisoners were being subjected to urinalysis. By the mid-'80s, defense-related contractors were pressed to test their work forces for purity. In the final days of the Reagan administration, the Federal Drug Free Workplace Act forced drug testing on all federal contractors working on projects of any appreciable size. From there, against sporadic and fractured

opposition by labor unions and civil liberties groups, urinalysis and drug-testing programs proliferated in almost every industry.

America's kids are now being subjected to the kind of intrusions the nation would inflict only upon conscripts and criminals just 20 or 30 years ago. Who knows how much further it could go? The latest decision in *Board of Education of Independent School District No. 92 v. Earls* essentially



opens the way for general random drug testing of America's entire school population, says Timothy Lynch, director of the Criminal Justice Project at the Cato Institute in Washington.

The first movement toward urinalysis of the total student population was choreographed by the Supreme Court in 1995 with the *Vernonia School District v. Acton* case in Oregon. The court decided, among other things, that since athletes shower together, they have little expectation of privacy—and thus urinalysis of athletes was deemed constitutional.

In the case of Lindsay Earls—who was humiliated after being yanked out of choir practice by Tecumseh school administrators and ordered to urinate on command (she tested negative)—the Supreme Court justices appeared eager to extend the scope of drug testing. In oral arguments last March, Justice Anthony Kennedy taunted ACLU Attorney Graham Boyd, hypothesizing that his client would prefer to attend a "druggie" school.

Writing for the majority, Justice Clarence Thomas extended the relevance of the factors used to test "reasonableness" of a search in *Vernonia* to apply much more broadly, while enthroning the school district's interest in detecting drug use. In a breathtaking act of militant

jurisprudence and shabby reasoning, Justice Thomas quickly expanded the universe of candidates for urinalysis and established a new entitlement for the state to determine the suitability of testing beyond parental guidance—"custodial responsibilities," he called it.

After the decision, scores of school districts immediately began inspecting the language of the decision and considering establishing their own urinalysis programs based on the Tecumseh model.

In the Lockney School District in West Texas, Superintendent Raymond Lusk told the *New York Times* in September, "We'll probably get 85 percent of the kids in extracurriculars. I think it would be fairer to test everybody, because why are some kids more important than others?"

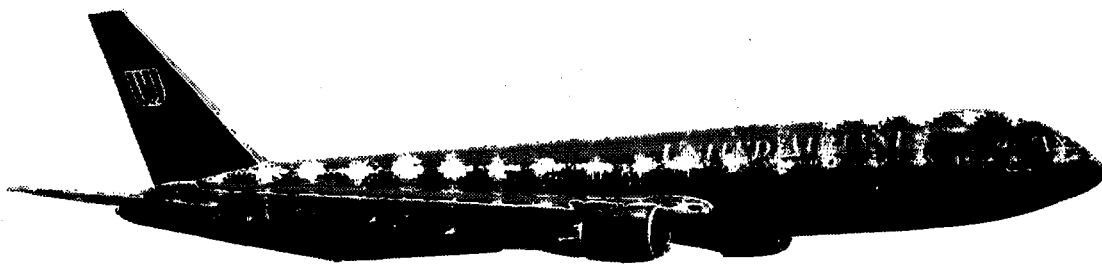
Touché. Now that there is a state entitlement to test at will, pressing the PC buttons that demand fairness in application of entitlements and social burdens will surely extend testing to all students.

The prognosis for the rest of us is just as grim. With the Supreme Court establishing that the state has a superseding interest in cultivating a therapeutic enforcement role that trumps even clear, constitutionally guaranteed freedoms, nothing should be ruled out of the realm of possibility. A drug test requirement when you renew your driver's license? For filing a tax return? Before you vote?

What's next? A drug test when you renew your driver's license? Before you vote?

Give it five years—or 50. Children are being acclimated to violations by the state that their grandparents would have found unconscionable. The future Supreme Court justices being conditioned in our schools today will no doubt chuckle in disbelief some day that on-demand urinalysis was ever an issue of legal contention.

Peter Cassidy writes on national affairs, the law and technology from Cambridge, Massachusetts. He can be reached at pcassidy@mit.edu.



How to Save the Airline Industry

By David Moberg

United Airlines may have gone over the financial cliff, but its troubles are only one part of an even bigger bankruptcy—the myth of deregulation.

In 2001, U.S. airlines lost \$7.7 billion, a record surpassed in 2002 when losses hit around \$9 billion, and forecasts for 2003 are grim. Clearly, the double whammy of the September 11 attacks and a slumping economy depressed travel. But the industry has a larger problem.

That problem is not the wages of airline workers, although those will be sacrificed to cut corporate losses. United is reportedly seeking \$2.4 billion a year in concessions from its employees (more than double what unions had already offered). But one aviation consulting firm reports that three other major airlines have higher labor costs than United as a percentage of operating expenses, and marginally profitable Southwest Airlines is close behind.

Many problems were created by the incompetence and greed of executives at United, who pursued a costly, unsuccessful takeover bid for the now bankrupt U.S. Air. The United bosses also failed to take advantage of the company's employee ownership to create a more participatory corporate cul-

ture to overcome old patterns of antagonism toward labor. But that's still only part of the picture.

The fundamental problem is deregulation itself, which has made the industry more vulnerable to boom and bust cycles, less efficient, less rational—and less appealing to travelers. And that's just in air transportation. In energy, telecommunications, cable television, banking and other industries, deregulation has hurt consumers, workers and the economy as a whole.

The federal Civil Aeronautics Board once regulated airline prices and routes. When Congress deregulated the

industry in 1978, experts predicted that customers would benefit immensely from more competition, lower fares and greater choice. On average, fares did fall 38 percent (adjusted for inflation) in the first 22 years after deregulation, according to the Consumers Union. But prices had fallen by a nearly identical amount in the two decades before 1978.

Deregulation may have created some bargain fares, but it led to a comparable amount of price-gouging. Under deregulation, the spread of fares among routes and classes of tickets was much greater, increasing the irrationality of the system from a traveler's point of view. Much of



Airline workers lobby Congress for aid after September 11.

"Unregulated markets do not move toward equilibrium. They move toward chaos."

In so doing, it contributed to the emergence of the hub-and-spoke system, in which major airlines compete to capture passengers from as many airports as possible, feed them into their hubs, then send them to their final destinations. For the biggest multinational airlines, hubs are essential—and they serve a real need of the system for "connectivity," the ability of travelers to easily move about a global network.

Yet as airlines compete to funnel passengers through their hubs, they rely more

Southwest is not a model for the whole air travel system. It doesn't provide optimum connectivity among travel destinations and essentially prospers by reducing services and feeding on the margins of the industry.

The problem is the system as a whole, not the management of individual airlines and not labor," argues Frederick Thayer, professor emeritus at the University of Pittsburgh and a longtime critic of airline deregulation. "The system as a whole is inefficient. Competition is what causes the problem and can't solve it."

While deregulation advocates stress the efficiencies of competition, Thayer says competitive inefficiencies drive up the costs per passenger mile of both labor and fuel (thus increasing the environmental harm of air travel). "All competition is redundancy," Thayer argues, "but when you have redundancy in this kind of thing, you're wasting a lot of fuel."

Elliott Sclar, a professor of urban planning at Columbia University and a transportation systems expert, agrees with Thayer's basic analysis about the ruinous effects of the unavoidable overcapacity in deregulated transportation systems. "My sense about all these transportation industries in general is that none of them works that well in the market," he says. "They all have very high fixed costs for infrastructure. In the end, they can't charge the user completely for the full cost of infrastructure, and they're very sensitive to cyclical factors in the economy."

Transportation flourishes because of a network, not just one enterprise. But the failure of a major enterprise can greatly disrupt the network. So there's a strong social inclination to let airlines continue to operate under bankruptcy supervision. Meanwhile, they can take advantage of their legal protection to cancel union contracts and renegotiate debts and other contractual obligations, adding to competitive pressures on companies not yet in bankruptcy.

the expansion of air travel and lower fares attributed to deregulation would have resulted from economic growth and technological change anyway. Effective regulation, however, could have brought even more gains.

If a deregulated system is going to work, there must be effective competition. But as University of Denver transportation expert Andrew Goetz argues, economies of scale give big airlines a big advantage. When new airlines trying to enter the market offer bargain rates, the established airlines match their low fares on the competing routes until they drive the competitor out of business. In turn, price-gouging remains rampant: Even the Department of Transportation acknowledges the "pockets of pain" around the country, where a single airline dominates a market and consumers pay through the nose.

The problem is not simply lack of competition, but competition itself. By definition, competition requires a surplus of seats as well as a variety of airlines. This inherent overcapacity is always wasteful, compared to an ideal system in which every seat is filled on every flight (and no one is denied the chance to travel). Deregulation only increased the overcapacity.

heavily on short, frequent flights and relatively small planes. This strategy is ultimately more expensive, creates more airspace congestion and is less fuel-efficient than a strategy that uses larger, more efficient planes to make direct, longer flights. The system also requires more labor concentrated in the big hubs to handle the complicated connections of people and baggage.

If the system works to capture more passengers and revenue for a big airline, then it can be profitable and enhance the airline's power. But it requires a much greater investment in the system infrastructure—of both people and physical facilities—which is especially vulnerable to economic downturns. The big airlines have accumulated massive debts to develop their far-flung, capital-intensive hub-and-spoke systems, and debt service has become a crushing burden as travel revenue slackens. Even though airlines have recently cut back their flight schedules, there has been a sharp increase in the percentage of seats that must be filled to break even.

This hub-and-spoke strategy is less efficient than the old-style point-to-point service employed successfully by Southwest Airlines. But low-cost

"Competition is overrated," Sclar says. "You could do the same thing with regulated prices. There are two beliefs in America—competition solves every problem, and competition is a garden variety weed that grows everywhere. But competition doesn't solve everything, and that competition is like a rare orchid."

Paul Dempsey of McGill University, the director of the Institute of Air and Space Law, says the airline losses demonstrate that fares are too low to sustain the system. But that doesn't mean that fares should go up, or that wages have to be cut. "If capacity were reduced and duplicative waste eliminated," Dempsey says, "the cost might actually go down."

With a transformation of the computer systems that airlines now use to fine-tune airfare discrepancies to maximize profit (and customer dissatisfaction), Dempsey says, the government could "regulate prices to reduce the level of pricing discrimination and exploitation and to ensure that companies were providing cost-based service that provides a reasonable return on investment."

Goetz and Dempsey both argue for a "light-handed" approach to re-regulation that would restore a federal role in allocating routes to assure some measure of competition and reduce excess capacity. At the same time, they argue for setting price ceilings and floors to reduce disparities but still give airlines flexibility.

Thayer argues that government planning—with input from airlines, unions, government and consumer interests—is required to develop a stable, rational and efficient system. "Contrary to the textbook, unregulated markets do not move toward equilibrium," says Thayer, especially in complex, interrelated systems like airlines. "They move toward chaos."

The free market fundamentalist quacks offer more privatization and less regulation as the solution to the current ailments of the airline industry. Despite rising consumer outrage over the effects of deregulation, it's still not politically popular to argue for regulation, even among Democrats. But the time has come to reassert the role of government in protecting the public interest. ■

Will free thought survive?



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Moderator: **Shirley Jahad**, news correspondent at Chicago Public Radio, 2002 Studs Terkel Award.

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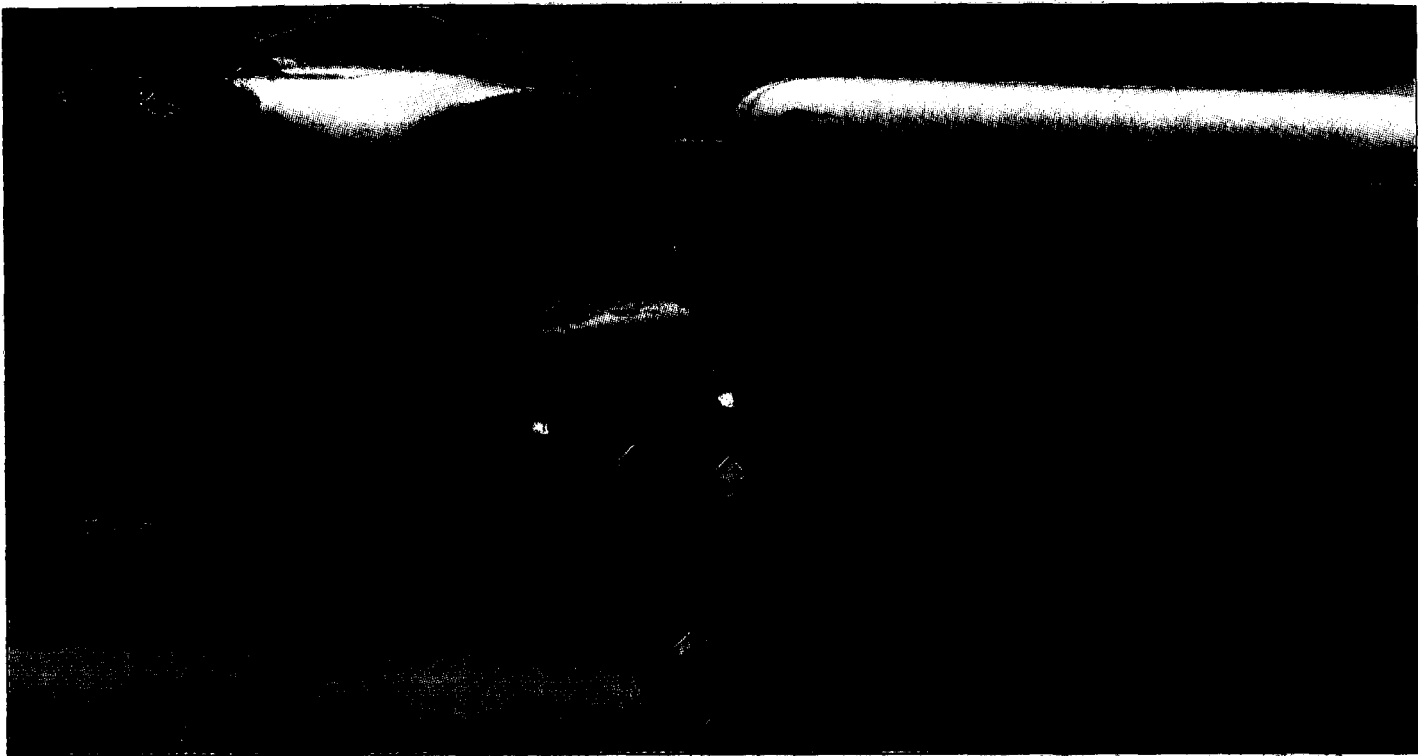
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HERE COMES THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Charlotte and the resegregation of America's public schools

BY DAMIEN JACKSON

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

Darius Swann remembers the blazing cross that illuminated the night sky outside his window at Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte. The year was 1966, and Swann, an African-American theology professor, had recently initiated a lawsuit against the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system after his 6-year-old son was denied admission to a nearby elementary because he was black. "There's always a certain amount of danger whenever you take a stand," says the Presbyterian minister.

Around that time, Swann recalls, the homes of several of the city's African-American leaders were firebombed. "It drove home the point that such issues were deeply embedded in the psyche of the community," he says. "People were willing to resort to extreme measures."

Swann was willing to go pretty far himself. For more than a decade, Swann pursued his case in the courts. The lawsuit that bore his name, *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, concluded successfully when a U.S. District Court judge ordered the creation of a more racially diverse school district. Later affirmed by the Supreme Court in 1971, Swann is commonly recognized as the case that "put the teeth" in the earlier *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by instituting timely and practical ways

of combating separate and unequal education, such as busing and race-conscious student assignments. The case changed the face of American education in the 20th century, as the nation's school districts followed its lead toward increasing integration.

More than two decades later, that face is changing back. A recent study by Gary Orfield of the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University shows that more than 70 percent of the nation's African-American students currently attend predominantly minority schools, or schools where more than half the students are minority. (Close to 76 percent of Latinos attend schools with non-white majorities.) Though this growing trend can be attributed, in part, to declining public school enrollment by whites, the study reveals that the typical white public school student is educated in an institution that is 80 percent white.

Since 1995, 45 school districts across the country have been declared "unitary"—that is, sufficiently desegregated—and had their federal desegregation orders rescinded by the courts. Challenges by critics of court-ordered desegregation have sparked recent or ongoing court battles in school districts in a majority of states, including Alabama, Florida, Massachusetts, Michigan and Pennsylvania.

The trend toward resegregation is particularly pronounced in the South, a region where most of the Swann-based remedies for

integrating schools were focused. Between 1988 and 1998, the percentage of blacks in majority white schools dropped from 43.5 to 32.7 percent. "There's something really bad happening," Orfield told a recent national conference on school resegregation at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. "It's related to race. And it's getting worse."

Charlotte, which less than two decades ago boasted one of the most integrated school systems in the country, is rapidly heading toward resegregation. In 1999, the *Swann* decision was overturned by U.S. District Court Judge Robert Potter, a busing critic, who declared the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school district to be unitary.

The ruling resulted from a lawsuit brought by white advocates of "neighborhood schools"—an assignment model that prioritizes attendance in a student's own neighborhood. Given that neighborhoods in and around Charlotte, like elsewhere, are largely divided along racial and ethnic lines, neighborhood school models make it virtually impossible for districts to avoid resegregation.

"There's absolutely nothing wrong with integrated schools," says Paul Haisley, a Charlotte accountant and outspoken advocate of neighborhood schools. "But if it means a kid is going to leave his own neighborhood to spend an hour on a school bus each day, is it really worth it? I don't think so."

A majority of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board was opposed to Potter's ruling—including all four African-American members—and it crafted a plan that tried to stem resegregation. The "school choice" plan allows parents to pick from a number of area schools within their "choice zone," with transportation provided. If they desire a school outside of their zone, they are responsible for their own transportation.

The plan prioritizes school choice for students whose home schools have high concentrations of poor students, and gives more funds to such schools. "Parents were leaving the system," contends Haisley, referring to the "white flight" commonly associated with increasing minority enrollment in a school district. "This plan was the best way of empowering parents and ensuring they had a choice."

Many African-Americans are less optimistic. "No community in America has ever been able to achieve separate but equal," says Arthur Griffin, a member of the school board who opposed the plan and Potter's ruling. Even with the new plan and a commitment from Charlotte's education, political and business leadership to equalize funding in majority-black city schools, Griffin believes school resegregation, along with its associated disparities, is just a matter of time. In the year since the plan has been in place, the number of elementary schools with more than 90 percent minority enrollment has already increased from nine to 16.

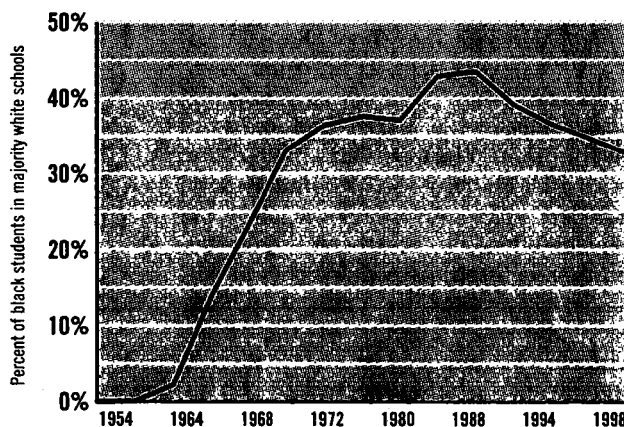
Orfield's study provides a broader interpretation. Not unlike the disparities that produced the *Brown* decision a half-century ago, the nation's majority-minority schools are commonly "isolated by race and poverty" while offering "vastly unequal educational opportunities" than their majority-white counterparts. This stark reality—based largely in historically segregated housing patterns, white flight and an inequitable reliance on local property taxes for school funding—provides an unhealthy prognosis for a large-scale return to neighborhood schools in African-American communities across the country.

"Philosophically, I support the concept of neighborhood schools," says Griffin, who feels all students should have quality schools close to home. "Unfortunately, all neighborhoods are not created equal."

They never were. For a decade after the *Brown* decision in 1954, widespread southern resistance to integration by local school boards kept the vast majority of African-American students in the South in segregated schools. The passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act stepped up the federal enforcement of desegregation orders and, by 1968, transformed the region into one where a quarter of all southern black students attended majority white schools.

After taking office in 1968, however, President Richard Nixon largely abandoned the enforcement of desegregation requirements, appointing four Supreme Court justices known for their pro-segregation leanings. The court issued a number of key decisions substantially limiting the scope and impact of school desegregation. *Keyes v. Denver* (1973) hampered plaintiffs in de facto segregated systems by requiring proof of "intentionally segregative school board actions in a meaningful portion of a school system."

Change in Black Segregation in the South, 1954-1998



Source: *Rethinking Schools*, Fall 2001

Milliken v. Bradley (1974) forbade such inter-district remedies to segregation as transferring students between predominantly black inner-cities and predominantly white suburbs.

Even so, earlier federal and local commitments, combined with the *Swann* decision, continued the trend toward integration. By 1988, the percentage of African-American students attending majority-white schools in the South peaked near 44 percent.

But this peak also marked a sharp turning point. The number of integrated southern schools steadily declined as a result of strong opposition to desegregation policy from the Reagan administration, which repealed federal desegregation assistance programs and advocated the end of relevant court orders. By the '90s, Supreme Court appointments by Reagan and George Bush Sr. had created a judicial majority committed to doing just that. In a number of key cases—including *Board of Education of Oklahoma City v. Dowell* and *Freeman v. Pitts*—the high court elected to end existing desegregation orders by making it easier to declare school systems unitary. It was irrelevant, the court further ruled, if the termination of such orders led to the resegregation of these school systems.

While capitalizing on an increasing political backlash to busing (yet not necessarily to integration), critics have often characterized school desegregation as a failed policy. Sociologist Roslyn Mickelson offers evidence to the contrary. The UNC-Charlotte professor, who spent years examining the academic impact of desegregation and related policies on students in Charlotte-Mecklenburg's public schools, found that "the more time both black and white students spent in desegregated elementary schools, the greater their academic achievement."

Her study highlights the positive effects of a desegregated setting on such current indicators of achievement as high school advanced placements and standardized test scores. It also reveals that "the higher the percent of blacks in a school, the lower the percent of the school's teachers who are fully credentialed, are experienced, and who possess master's degrees."

Mickelson concludes that the likely resegregation of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools "does not bode well for black children's education prospects." As the district returns to segregated neighborhood schools, she writes, "we can anticipate that racial antagonisms and racial gaps in achievement and attainment will grow."

While most black Charlotte residents say they should have access to good schools in their own neighborhoods, and some of them insist the burden of busing was placed disproportionately on their black children, most are quick to clarify that such sentiment does not reflect abandonment of the ideals of desegregation. "The customary line has been that we need to keep diversity in our schools," says Blanche Penn, a parent leader and the director of the West Charlotte Community Center. "I haven't heard anyone say otherwise."

Apparently, Charlotte residents are still largely committed to the concepts of integration and equity in funding. Griffin and other pro-desegregation African-Americans were recently re-elected to the school board by substantial margins over white advocates of neighborhood schools.

Even so, says Stoney Sellers, a prominent Charlotte businessman and community activist, it's ultimately a question of limited resources in a rapidly growing city. "At some point, as the growth continues, will the community choose school equity first, or will the money follow the development of all the new schools we're building?" Sellers asks. "Seven to 10 years down the road, how will our communities look then?"

"I am more concerned that a child is succeeding rather than if that child is in a diverse setting or not," says Lindalyn Kakadelis, a former school board member and teacher in Charlotte, who argues that diversity is an imprecise term "since we're almost at a point in America where white is a minority." Kakadelis says "the bottom line is student achievement," and she's "so tired of people making excuses" for low achievers and acting like "victims" of poverty and other social ills. "What I'm for," she adds, is "pushing everybody to succeed in their own schools."

"We know it's not just about integration or sitting in the same classrooms with whites," Sellers counters. His concerns are educational quality, the distribution of resources and academic achievement. "School desegregation wouldn't have meant much if there had been no impact on educational achievement."

"If we had the money, the certified teachers and everything we needed in our neighborhood schools, then I wouldn't have a problem with segregated schools," Penn says. "But we know that's not going to happen. The resources follow the folks with the money."

For Penn, it's back to the future. "Putting kids back in neighborhood schools brings back memories," she says, recalling her own experiences as a teen-age student at all-black West Charlotte High. "We got all the old, leftover books." She quickly adds that the African-American community "doesn't want leftovers."

Swann, who no longer lives in Charlotte, acknowledges the irony of his desire 30 years ago for his son to attend a white school in his own neighborhood. He contends that, for African-Americans, neighborhood schools are less significant

because neighborhoods now reflect "proximity as opposed to a real community. A lot of people don't even know their neighbors."

Even so, without solutions to the current trend, African-Americans could find themselves with leftovers again. But despite the increasingly conservative tone of the country and its judicial system, new attempts at maintaining diversity in the public schools are afoot. A number of systems—including North Carolina's Wake County Schools, which includes Raleigh, the capital—are considering socioeconomic status in school assignments. In San Francisco, schools are using a "diversity index" that accounts for economic status, parental education levels and the number of languages spoken at a student's home. Similar approaches are being tried in Manchester,

Connecticut, and La Crosse, Wisconsin.

But for some there's a bottom line. "Integrated neighborhoods produce integrated schools," says Steve Johnston, executive director of the Charlotte-based Swann Fellowship. The nonprofit organization, named for Swann and his wife Vera, was formed in 1997 to advance the value of diversity in public education.

Johnston contends that until white people and the institutions they control pay equitable wages to people of color and allow for the kind of educational institutions that can produce economic parity, the onus will always be on whites to make neighborhoods and schools integrated. "Economic diversity in housing patterns will create diverse schools," he says.

To Johnston, the solution is simple. "We can wait until we're all brown, or we can work at living together."

Swann adds: "I believe that the public school is the most important element in the transformation of a society. If the schools can change, then so can it." ■

Damien Jackson is a writer in North Carolina. This story was produced under the George Washington Williams Fellowship for Journalists of Color, a project sponsored by the Independent Press Association.

PHILOSOPHICALLY,
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Broken People, Broken Promises



Dalits face a new threat
from India's Hindu nationalists

Stick-wielding Hindu mobs rampage through Gujarat
last March. The riots left 2,000 dead.

By Jehangir Pocha

Audiences in Bombay's derelict Art-Deco cinema halls often hoot and whistle when their hero vanquishes a villain. Made to formula, Bollywood movies often end with the hero punching up a local *thakkur*, an upper-caste landlord, for the many injustices he perpetrated against the peasants during the preceding three hours. When the battered villain finally begs for mercy between sobs of guilt and remorse, the hero usually shows his softer side and reprimands the landlord. At this point, a police officer magically appears to handcuff the chastised villain and thank the hero for fighting the good fight: "Now the law will give him his punishment," the officer says, as the curtain comes down to cheers.

But Bollywood is a fantasy.

In a 2,000-year-old hangover from one bad idea, India's 250 million "untouchables," who call themselves Dalits, and tribal people still endure crushing oppression and political manipulation from upper castes. The category of "untouchables" was officially abolished in India more than half a century ago, but despite affirmative action that has led to considerable gains for the group—two Indian governments have been led by Dalit parties—discrimination and persecution of Dalits are still rife. Human rights groups estimate that hundreds of thousands of caste-based crimes occur in India each year. Very few of these are reported. Only a handful are ever prosecuted.

Caste conflict does not produce many soundbites or banner headlines. The stories of these silent sieges are buried in local newspapers and dusty police logs in remote Indian villages. They are about the grim, persistent denial of basic human rights to about 250 million people, and the regular but unspectacular injustices perpetrated against them by oppressors who consider them the lowest human life form. The dehumanizing nature of these crimes reveals more about the problem than sheer numbers.

- India's National Human Rights Commission reports that, in some areas, Dalits are still forced to live in segregated colonies and work in inhuman conditions. They are "denied the use of the same wells and the same temples as caste Hindus, and are even forbidden to drink from the same cups in tea stalls," says Dr. K. Jamnadas, a leading Dalit activist.

- In the aftermath of a 2001 earthquake in Gujarat, relief agencies were forced to mark their supplies of blood with the caste of the person it came from, or else people would not use them.

- That same year in Agra, home of the Taj Mahal, a low-caste woman named Sukhviri Devi was stripped naked and beaten to death by two upper-caste men. Her sin was to cross their path while carrying an empty pail—an inauspicious act. The attack

India's Caste Politics

Ever since the law-giver Manu divided ancient Indian society into a hierarchical system, every aspect of a Hindu's life—name, schooling, occupation, housing, marriage, worship, rights—has been determined by caste.

Manu's system segregated individuals on the basis of "ritual purity." Caste Hindus were considered essential to the functioning of life and subdivided into four principal categories, or *varnas*. *Brahmins* (priests) and *Kshatriyas* (warriors) enjoyed an exalted position in society and a monopoly on religious education and political power. *Vaishyas* (traders and merchants) were allowed some privileges and the chance to acquire wealth and land. *Shudhras* (peasants and artisans) worked to provide for the other castes.

Persons considered "too fallen" to merit inclusion in any caste became the "untouchables." Considered "human pollution," they were shunned by caste Hindus and forced to live on the periphery of life as scavengers and dung-gatherers. Along with India's ancient tribal people, who were seen as backward and subhuman, they were reduced to living in appalling conditions with no land or legal rights.

Since the caste system was abolished in 1950, successive governments have instituted programs to assist untouchables, who call themselves Dalits, or "broken people." These include a series of land reforms and a system of "reservations"—affirmative-action programs that give Dalits and tribals preferred access to government jobs and education.

But such programs have been fiercely resisted by members of upper castes, who are eager to preserve their privileged lifestyle, and who are acutely aware that Dalit and tribal emancipation would undermine the entire caste-based feudal economy. Official figures show that Brahmins, who make up just 5 percent of the population, still hold 70 per-

cent of senior government jobs and 78 percent of all judicial positions.

The continued lack of educational opportunities for India's poorest people means the divide in literacy rates between Dalits and the upper classes has barely narrowed since the late '60s. Most Dalits remain locked in menial jobs. At golf clubs, five-star hotels, corporate headquarters and government offices, the shabby, sad-eyed toilet cleaners who creep apologetically from restroom to restroom continue to be almost exclusively Dalit.

The failure of land reform programs designed to uplift rural Dalits has been even more abject. According to Human Rights Watch, upper-class landlords have often murdered Dalits and tribals who sought to assert their land rights, usually after gruesome torture and humiliation intended to intimidate others. Dalits' homes, shrines and political centers have been destroyed for similar reasons.

Typical is the case of Samendra Sain, who was tortured, humiliated and then shot dead in front of his wife and fellow villagers by upper-caste landlords in March 2000 after he refused to hand over land allotted to him during a land reform program in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Such gruesome incidents are so common that even Dalit activists say that, after a point, it seems meaningless to track them.

Such actions have ensured that most Dalits remain landless. Compelled to work as serfs for extremely low wages on land owned by upper-caste landlords, they often fall into debt with local money-lenders, who give them small sums at high interest rates. Once locked into debt, Dalits are often forced to work for years as illegally bonded labor or prostitutes (the only time when "untouchables" suddenly become touchable). Human Rights Watch estimates that there are more than 40 million forced laborers in India, most of whom are Dalit, and 15 million of whom are children.

When a local NGO rescued five Dalit laborers from a stone quarry near Bangalore last year, they found the workers shackled in irons that had been welded shut. Official apathy, and even hostility to demands that the government crack down on the intricate systems of serfdom, money-lending and forced labor that have become ingrained within rural Indian society, means few of these cases are ever prosecuted. —J.P.

occurred just days before President Clinton's visit to the city.

● In Bareilly, in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, a local official, Shabbir Ahmad, beat to death a low-caste teen-ager in 2000 for plucking flowers from his garden.

● Last year in Lucknow, also in Uttar Pradesh, in a grotesquely medieval version of a classic romantic tragedy, a lower-caste girl and upper-caste boy were publicly lynched by their families, who were incensed at the "impure" relationship. Hundreds watched and applauded.

Even as many Dalits and tribals struggle for access to the full legal rights granted to them in 1950, they face a new and insidious threat from India's Hindu nationalists—a threat that could subvert their fledgling political movement, unleash new waves of violence, and trap them once again onto the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy.

On October 15, as people all over India celebrated the Hindu festival of *dusherra*, five Dalits were arrested by local police in the Jhajjar district of the state of Haryana. Their alleged crime: killing and skinning a cow in public. (Cow slaughter, in deference to Hindu sensibilities, is banned in most of India.) When news of the arrests spread, a mob broke into the police station and lynched the five men in the presence of more than 50 policemen, city magistrates and government officials. Later, police admitted that there was no evidence against the men.

Ethnic tensions had been high in Jhajjar since 33 Dalit families converted to Islam sometime in August. Historically, many Dalits have converted to Buddhism, Christianity or Islam to escape the "badge of dishonor" orthodox Hinduism placed on them. Local NGOs and political parties charged that the attack had been politically motivated by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal, two Hindu fundamentalist organizations.

The attack brought into sharp relief the escalating tensions between Dalits and the Sangh Parivar, the Hindu nationalist movement that encompasses the government's ruling

Many Dalits, like this man at a Buddhist rally, have converted to escape the "badge of dishonor" orthodox Hinduism placed on them.



Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The Sangh Parivar wants to unite all India's ethnic groups against Muslims and Christians. In what has been described as a "war for souls," the Sangh Parivar has launched an aggressive campaign to convince Dalits and tribals to surrender their traditional identities and follow mainstream Hinduism.

The BJP's artful manipulation of Hindu-Muslim divisions brought it to power in 1998 as the head of a coalition government, but it has never won an absolute parliamentary majority. Suspicious of the BJP's campaign for law based on *Hindutva*, an orthodox set of Hindu principles, India's 250 million Dalits have found greater common cause with India's 120 million Muslims and other minorities. Their alliance, thus far, has limited the BJP's ability to further the Hindu nationalist agenda.

The Sangh Parivar's efforts to convert untouchables and tribals is a cynical attempt to fracture their sense of solidarity with Muslims. "The party wants to direct the combined force of this massive vote bank against Muslims and Christians, whom it despises, and transform secular India into a Hindu state ruled by *Hindutva*," says Radhika Desai, a professor at the University of Victoria in Canada, who works with tribal communities in Gujarat.

The Sangh Parivar claims that their efforts to absorb these people "back" into Hinduism is an attempt to ameliorate the caste differences that have separated Dalits and tribals from mainstream society in the first place. But a closer look at the Sangh Parivar's conversion programs reveals a different agenda. In recent years, it has begun to establish a network of religious schools and development centers across India's remote and tribal areas.

Funded extensively by the Indian expatriate community in the United States, these schools are the Trojan horse of the Hindu right. Luring credulous and desperately poor Dalit and tribal youth with promises of education and social uplift, the Sangh Parivar preaches a radical version of Hindu supremacy that gains strength at the expense of Indian Muslims and other minorities.

groups systematically trucked intoxicated mobs into Muslim areas, directing them via computerized lists to destroy Muslim property. Within hours, a state renowned for its ancient citadels and verdant hamlets lay blood-drenched, scorched and pillaged.

According to the People's Union for Civil Liberties, areas where large numbers of youth are enrolled in tribal development centers experienced some of the worst violence against Muslims. As smoke still billowed from burning cities and scorched fields, K.K. Shastri, chairman of a Sangh Parivar group in Gujarat, publicly praised rioters from an area where his group runs a tribal development center: "They have done an amazing job."

"The irony of it all," says Deepika Chadha, an activist in Gujarat, "is that the most backward community, the tribals, were being manipulated into battering the next most backward, the Muslims, at the behest of the most privileged."

Despite promises to the contrary, critics say, the converts from the Sangh Parivar religious schools are not treated as equals in their new faith. In an ingenious move designed to retain the basic principles of caste superiority, Dalit and tribal converts are assigned to worship only the minor gods of Hinduism, like Hanuman, the warrior monkey-king who served Ram, but not major gods like Ram himself. "Making tribals and Dalits worship a minor god who was a disciple of their own god is not a way of giving them a place, but a way of showing them their place," Desai says. "It's like Christian missionaries seeing new converts as somewhat unworthy of worshipping Christ and teaching them to worship Peter instead. It's not conversion, it's subversion."

While aggressively pursuing its own "conversion strategy," the Sangh Parivar and its allies are sponsoring state-level legislation banning religious conversion. Legal experts say that the legislation is written in such a way that it uses the Sangh Parivar's definition of Hinduism to delegitimize Dalit conversions to Islam or Christianity, while allowing Dalit conversion

The U.S. Connection

The powerful Indian-American diaspora is helping to shake the foundations of a democratic, secular country, driving it toward Hindu chauvinism.

The Indian community in the United States has recently become America's wealthiest minority and has doubled in size over the past decade to almost 2 million people. It has also become an increasingly influential player in India's politics.

Many in the Indian diaspora, while outwardly blending in with America's cosmopolitan identity, have more conservative views than Indians living in India. Most of Indian-American society is organized along lines of caste, race and religion. With the financial and political support of these conservatives, caste and ethnicity are emerging as the primary forces shaping Indian politics.

A large and powerful section of the community, which has a disproportionately high percentage of upper castes, has become enthusiastic bankrollers of the Sangh Parivar's religious nationalism and pro-business policies. "At least \$6 million has been officially raised in the United States by Sangh Parivar groups fronting as charitable organizations and sent to its tribal development centers," says Vijay Prashad, director of international studies at Trinity College in Connecticut. "Money is also raised informally through private dinners and the like and sent illegally to the BJP."

This process is illegal in the United States, where there has been a post-

9/11 crackdown on underground financial networks allegedly connected to al-Qaeda, and in India, where there is a ban on foreign funding of political parties. However, it continues to operate virtually unchecked.

A recent report co-authored by Prashad says that supporters of the Hindu right in the United States have established several U.S. "subsidiaries" of the Sangh Parivar. These include such organizations as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, the India Development and Relief Fund, the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh and the Hindu Heritage Endowment.

Prashad's report illustrates the Sangh Parivar's elaborate and complex system of fundraising through charitable fronts. Often presenting themselves as non-political organizations, Prashad says, U.S.-based groups such as the Indian Development and Relief Fund and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America run programs with feel-good names like "Support-A-Child" to raise money from unsuspecting Americans.

In the past, the Indian Development and Relief Fund has held official fundraising drives at companies such as Cisco, Sun and Oracle. These companies even matched the funds their employees contributed.

The bulk of these funds are then sent to organizations in India such as Sewa Bharti and Keshava Seva Samithi, which operate schools and centers to convert Dalits.

Both the U.S. organizations and their Indian partners claim these schools are meant to protect tribals, and they deny having any link to the Sangh Parivar. But in Hyderabad, for example, Keshava Seva Samithi shares its headquarters with the leading Sangh Parivar organization in the city.

Shyam Tiwari, the spokesman for the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, which runs the Support-A-Child Program, also denies that his organization has a political agenda or connection to the VHP in India—a leading Sangh Parivar organization. "There is no connection to the VHP except in name," he says. "We are totally separate. They do not tell us what to do, and we do not tell them."

But Tiwari acknowledges that many U.S.-based charitable organizations "may have been started by ex-members of the Sangh Parivar in their private capacity" and may have "informal links with those parties in India."

Tiwari also denies that the Support-A-Child program funds Sangh Parivar activities. "The Support-A-Child program is run without bias of religion or anything for the poor students," he says. But he admits that 75 percent of the funds from the Support-A-Child program are sent to students enrolled in VHP-affiliated schools in India.

The compelling evidence that these U.S. groups are linked to ethnic violence in India has led more than 250 South Asian academics to start informing donors about where the money ends up. "When giving funds to projects with names like Support-A-Child," Prashad says, "people often have no idea that their money is being used to convert tribal kids into Hindu fundamentalists." —J.P.

to Hinduism. Recently the southern state of Tamil Nadu, which is governed by a BJP ally, became the first state to pass such a law. More states are poised to follow, even though restrictions on conversion defy India's constitution.

To curry support from the electorate, the Sangh Parivar is packaging its call for a homogenous Hindu identity around the age-old argument that divisions within Hinduism weaken India. It claims that it is protecting India and Hinduism, which it sees as synonymous, from the "foreign influences" of Islamic Pakistan, Communist China and the Christian West.

To further isolate Muslims and Christians, the Sangh Parivar is also pressuring India's non-Muslim and non-Christian minorities—Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists—to embrace the Hinduva platform. In a sweeping and novel definition of

Hinduism, the Sangh Parivar claims that all people and faiths with "roots in India" are Hindu. In this view, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are merely Hindu sub-sects.

The situation reveals the complex tessellation of caste and religion that is driving India's increasingly ethnic politics. "The BJP's main aim today is to try and gloss over historical differences within Hinduism and mold Hindus into a single vote bloc it can control," Desai says. "But the Sangh Parivar's vision is not of a faith where all are equal. It is of a faith where all others agree to abide by the orthodox rules of a select few. ... It is Brahminism revisited." ■

Jehangir Pocha, a native of Bombay, is an international journalist based in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The Graveyard of Secular Politics

By Miranda Kennedy

PHOTO: Muslims wait in line to vote near Ahmedabad on December 12.

Muslims who lost their homes last spring, women were weeping on the floor as the results came in. The camp organizer, Ataullakhan Pathan, sat with his hands tightly clenched over a bare table. "There is no future for Muslims in India, especially not in Gujarat," he said. "After everything the BJP has done to us, for them to win with such a clear majority means we are not wanted here."

In the weeks leading up to the elections, Modi repeatedly invoked the deaths of Hindus last spring. Campaign posters plastered across the state depict Modi beside a burning railway car. "The geography of the BJP's victory is the hot spots of anti-Muslim violence," points out Ahmedabad-based social worker Achyut Yagnik. "The BJP was successful because they equated Muslims with Pakistan and the rise of pan-Islamic terror."

Over the past several years, the BJP has been losing ground across India, and Gujarat is one of only three states where the party still holds power. Yagnik fears the BJP will replicate the appeal of sectarian violence and Hindu

revivalism in upcoming national elections, just two years away. In the flush of the BJP victory, Pravin Togadia of the right-wing Vishwa Hindu Parishad declared Gujarat "the graveyard of secular politics."

Many of Ahmedabad's Muslim ghettos were deserted as the results came in. Residents cast their vote for the Congress Party and left, fearing violence would follow a BJP victory. In some parts of the state, victory processions marched through Muslim areas, sparking riots. Two people were killed and at least a dozen injured during one BJP rally.

Jamila Bibi decided there was no point in leaving her Ahmedabad slum. Last spring, the mobs destroyed her home, and her son escaped with serious burns, leaving her as the family's sole breadwinner. "I pray that the next time they come after us, they will just finish us. I would rather they kill me. Because I cannot go on dying every day." ■

AHMEDABAD, INDIA

December's watershed elections in Gujarat sent India reeling to the right. The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won a thumping two-thirds majority in Gujarat's state assembly, washing out the opposition, the secular Congress Party. Chief Minister Narendra Modi led his party to victory with one of the most vitriolic anti-Muslim election campaigns in India's history, in the wake of the worst religious pogroms India has seen in 50 years.

On December 15, as the BJP landslide became clear, the streets of Ahmedabad, Gujarat's largest city, burst into a sea of confetti and saffron flags. Outside the BJP headquarters, supporters set off endless rounds of firecrackers—shouting "Hindus forever!"—and handed out victory sweets to the crowds.

But for the Muslims of Gujarat, it was a day of silence and fear. Last February, after nearly 60 Hindus were

killed on a train in Gujarat, reprisal killings of Muslims convulsed the BJP-led state for weeks. In the bloody month of March, armed Hindu mobs targeted Muslim-owned homes and businesses across Gujarat, raped and killed thousands of women, and burned Muslim men alive. Police and state officials stood by and watched. By the time the state finally took control of the mobs, more than 100,000 people had lost their homes, and at least 2,000 people were dead.

Dozens of human rights reports have indicted Modi and his government for complicity in the reprisal killings of Muslims. Last month, a citizens' tribunal led by former Indian high court judges concluded that the attacks were "an organized crime perpetuated by the state's chief minister and his government." But no action has been taken against any government or police official.

Only a few streets away from the BJP headquarters, in a relief camp for



MANDEL NGAN/AFP

The Bad News Bears

By David Hawkes

Mike Davis begins *Dead Cities*, his latest jeremiad, by noting that the attacks of September 11 have knocked many erstwhile leftists off-balance: "Even professional ironists like

Dead Cities
By Mike Davis
The New Press
432 pages, \$27.95

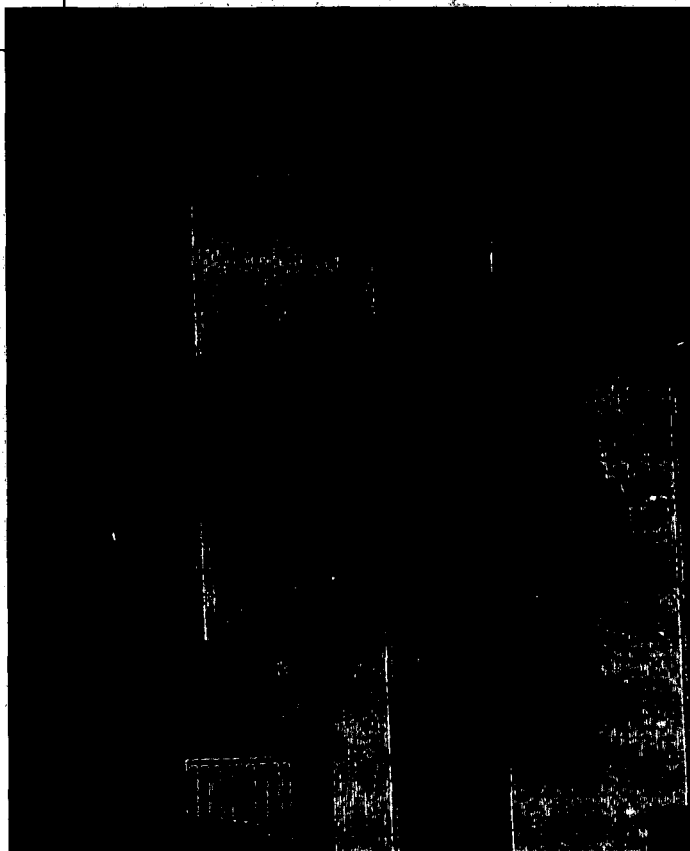
Christopher Hitchens police the sacred 'no irony' zone that surrounds the ruins of the World Trade Center."

By contrast, Davis argues that 9/11 was ironic in the true sense of the word: a sign whose actual meaning was different from its apparent meaning. In the immediate aftermath, raising questions about the meaning of the attacks was considered almost disloyal. To ask why they happened was tantamount to applauding them. We were emphatically told that the destruction of the World Trade Center did not mean anything, that it had no significance, that it was not, could not be—God forbid, it should not be—a sign.

In Davis' worldview, everything is a sign. The adjective most frequently applied to his unique intellectual blend of sociology, cosmology and economics is "apocalyptic," and he certainly perceives a prophetic significance in what he refers to as "the flames of New York." The word "apocalypse," Davis reminds us, means "revelation," and to study apocalypse is to reveal the meanings behind the signs of history.

Davis sees historical meaning everywhere: in the hot-rod riots of 1950s California, in the unwonted prevalence of hermaphroditism among polar bears, in the K-T asteroid collision that wiped out the dinosaurs, in the carpet-bombing of Berlin, in the tsunamis of Hawaii, in the ecology of Las Vegas, in the urban planning of Los Angeles.

His work exhilarates the reader by conveying the inter-relatedness of all things. By the end of *Dead Cities*, we are completely assured of the intimate connections between the Byzantine feuds of the Compton Bloods, the Ghost Dance of the 19th-century Plains Indians, the romance between Shiva and Gaia, and ursine gender-bending at the North Pole.



Were "the flames of New York" just the beginning?

His ability to unite vastly disparate subjects through a consistent, unified vision sets Davis apart from other leftist commentators, and his method is unabashedly totalizing. His chapters on the environment assume that what we call "nature" is both cause and effect of what we call "culture"; his studies of urban geography show how cities are physically shaped by factors that we think of as "economic"; his analysis of cosmology suggests that history and biology are guided by extraterrestrial forces.

Davis is fascinated by "catastrophist" scientific theories, which recently have demonstrated that the history of our planet and its life forms is determined largely by arbitrary, random events, rather than by gradual, teleological development, as Victorian thinkers supposed. The course of evolution was influenced more by a single, chance collision with a comet than by millennia of competitive adaptation.

The ancient idea of an organic connection between the microcosm of the individual and the macrocosm of the universe

looks less superstitious now than it did a century ago. What happens on earth, it seems, is determined by what happens in space. Davis approvingly quotes the work of geologist Herbert Shaw: "The most mind-bending implication is the possibility that synchronicity may extend between phenomena as widely separated in space and time as biochemical genetics and intergalactic dynamics."

Davis devotes a third of this book to such "extreme science," which "has seeded the fields of philosophy with discoveries every bit as strange and revelatory as those of Magellan and Galileo." Drawing especially on Shaw and the cosmology of Stuart Ross Taylor, Davis describes the recent revolution against the "uniformitarian consensus" in various scientific disciplines.

Uniformitarianism is the belief that change takes place at a uniform, gradual

and therefore predictable pace. Newton and Darwin "expelled chaos" from their respective disciplines, and they claimed to give materialist, mechanistic explanations for the phenomena they studied. For example, Darwin argued that the incredibly harmonious adaptation of ecosystems could be explained by the "survival of the fittest." There was no room in this explanation for extraneous chance or random influences on the process.

But it now appears that such "chance" influences have actually been the pri-

many factors driving evolution. And this resurrects a set of questions that materialist science once seemed to have answered forever.

One logical conclusion of catastrophism is that life elsewhere in the universe is virtually impossible—as probable, says Taylor, as “finding an elephant on Mars.” The combination of circumstances that produced our solar system is almost inconceivably unlikely; we are not the inevitable products of an incremental evolution of species, but the stupendously improbable results of “chance” collisions of galaxies. Philosophers are only just beginning to ponder the significance of that, but one thing is already clear: We can no longer delude ourselves that we have answered the eternal questions of how and why we came to be here.

In his understandable enthusiasm for the new science, Davis gets rather brusque with recent philosophy: “While postmodernism has defoliated the humanities and turned textualism into a prison-house of the soul, the natural sciences ... have once again, as in the time of Darwin, Wallace, Huxley and Marx, become the sites of extraordinary debates that resonate at the deepest levels of human culture.”

It is easy to empathize with Davis’ hostility to postmodernist cheerleaders, but occasionally his rancor overcomes his reason:

Although the academy may still favor the esoteric relativity of postmodern textualism, vulgar economic determinism—which begins and ends with the superprofits of the energy sector—currently holds the real seats of power. We don’t need Derrida to know which way the wind blows or why the pack ice is disappearing.

Certainly it is true that money rules the world, but Derridean philosophy can help us understand how it manages to do so. The thing to remember about money is that it is not real, it does not exist. Money is a system of representation that imposes itself upon the real world, remaking that world in its own image. It is, we might say, a text—Davis himself refers to “fictional capital”—and the approach that Davis hastily dismisses as “postmodern textualism” has much to say about the ways in which texts can be used to dominate and distort our material lives.

Davis’ eschatological approach will win him few friends on the traditional left, which, insofar as it is interested in science at all, remains doggedly devoted to the reductive materialism of the 19th century. Perhaps this explains why so much of the radical intelligentsia scurried after the imperialist bandwagon in the wake of 9/11. The progressive thinkers of the West are so deeply committed to materialism that they simply cannot take other modes of thought seriously.

To return to the obvious example, Christopher Hitchens’ willful innocence

To find scholars with a comparable breadth of vision, we have to look back to the sages who tried to make sense of Victorian science.

of theology often reduces him to the intellectual level of a child discovering the truth about Santa Claus. In a recent article he pouts, “There is no such person as God Almighty and thus all prayer by all denominations has the same moral effect as aerobic dancing.”

Such ignorance is emphatically refuted by Davis’ book, which gives lengthy, sympathetic attention to such prayer-based social movements as the Ghost Dance and the Pentecostal revival in Southern California. In fact, *Dead Cities* describes hyper-real events and situations for which the language and concepts of materialism are clearly inadequate. The first of these is 9/11 itself, when “the hijacked planes were aimed to impact precisely at the vulnerable border between fantasy and reality.”

The same can be said of the prophetic movement that swept the American Indian world following Wounded Knee. The white men claimed ownership of the land on the basis of the obviously, indeed admittedly, fantastic and imaginary phenomenon called “money,” and, to Davis, “the essence of the Ghost Dance ... is precisely the moral stamina to outlast this great mirage.”

Davis reminds us of the radical role often played by Western religions: “The Pentecostals sometimes seemed to con-

fuse Biblical eschatology with Marxist theory, as when Sister Galmond prophesied a great ‘War of Labor against Capital.’ ” She backed up her prophecy by citing Revelations to show that no one could buy and sell without the mark of the Beast.

Davis approvingly cites Stephen King’s *The Stand*, in which Las Vegas becomes Satan’s earthly capital, a description that Davis is inclined to take literally: “No other city in the American West seems to be as driven by occult forces.”

Davis is not speaking metaphorically. Regarding Hiroshima, he remarks that “American ‘know-how’ literally manufactured the fires of hell.” The Dugway weapons testing site is “the devil’s own laboratory”; we suffer under a “diabolical zeitgeist,” in which we are “confronted by the Devil himself.” San Francisco, in a rare lapse of originality, is “Babylon by the Bay.”

Davis despises the celebratory attitude that many purported radicals adopt toward market society, and he excoriates postmodernist political dilettantes like Frank Gehry, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown (authors of *Learning from Las Vegas*) in moralistic terms usually reserved for Satan’s minions. He reacts to the current epidemics of natural disasters and bizarre species mutations by observing that “strange portents are everywhere,” and the book’s last chapter is portentously titled, “Strange Times Begin.”

Moving through this catalog of plague, famine, war and death, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that Davis has returned to a mode of critique that is older, but perhaps more apposite to our historical moment, than the Enlightenment materialism traditionally espoused by Western radicals.

Materialists still assume that their theories are supported, or rather proved, by empirical science. As Davis shows, that is no longer the case. He recalls how, although Isaac Newton was a devoted astrologer, alchemist and Biblical exegete, “the Newton deified by the Enlightenment was seen to have expelled from the heavens the apocalyptic Comet—symbol of extraterrestrial influence over Earth history—that had excited medieval imaginations.”

The new cosmology restores "the apocalyptic Comet" to its central role as a determining factor in history, but it has not yet spawned a new philosophy to call into doubt the mechanistic assumptions inherited from the Victorians.

No doubt because he has never held a tenure-track academic position, Davis gleefully transcends the narrow and pedantic limitations of discipline and "field of expertise." To find scholars with a comparable breadth of vision, we have to look back to the sages who tried to make philosophical sense of Victorian science.

John Ruskin, in particular, possessed a similarly omnivorous intellectual voracity, and his influence on Davis is clear. Near the end of *Dead Cities*, Davis

discusses Ruskin's famous speeches on "The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth-century" which, as one bemused contemporary remarked, "just blames air pollution on the devil."

Ruskin surveyed the environmental devastation wrought on England by the Industrial Revolution, and asked what it meant. He found little help in the mechanistic thought of his own day: "If, in conclusion, you ask me for any conceivable cause or meaning of these things—I can tell you none, according to your modern beliefs, but I can tell you what meaning it would have borne to the men of old time."

Although Davis does not follow Ruskin into overt demonology—

indeed, he describes his mentor's state of mind as "clearly delusional"—*Dead Cities* seems intended as a 21st-century continuation of Ruskin's project. Readers who remain dogmatically committed to materialism will ask how anyone could possibly perceive a sign of cosmic meaning in the shriveling of polar bears' penises. Davis, on the other hand, insists that we regard the emasculated bruins as an omen, a portent, a "terrifying symptom of unspeakable tampering with the biosphere."

Who is really being superstitious here? ■

David Hawkes teaches at Lehigh University. His latest book is *Idols of the Marketplace*.

The Cheerleader

By G. Pascal Zachary

In page after dreadful page of his latest book, *Bush at War*, Bob Woodward demonstrates an old adage about journalism in wartime: The

empiricism. The touchstone of his greatness is clear: As a cub reporter in the '70s, Woodward helped bring down President Nixon by exposing in the *Washington Post* the web of deceit and intrigue that

lay behind a bungled burglary of a Democratic Party office in Washington's Watergate hotel.

The media establishment repeatedly dismissed Watergate as irrelevant. But Woodward, along with his co-reporter Carl Bernstein and legendary *Post* editor Ben Bradlee, resisted pressure to abandon their investigation, overcoming skepticism even from within their own newsroom.

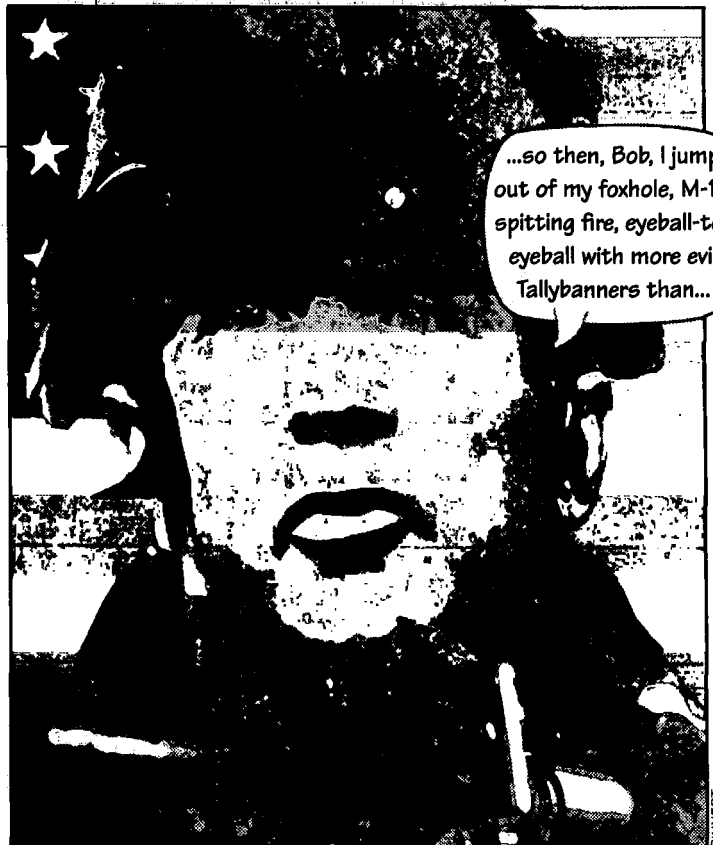
Watergate made Woodward a star; Robert Redford even played him in a hit movie. While he remained at the *Post* as a reporter and editor, Woodward gradually acceded to the pressure of his own reputation. To bolster his journalistic "brand" as a scoopmeister, he gradually turned from hard-hitting exposure to titillating gossip. Woodward married his reportage to a crass form of literary journalism, revealing powerful figures by getting inside their heads. At first mildly critical, these stream-of-consciousness accounts (for example, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA: 1981-1987* or *The Commanders*, about the invasion of Panama) turned increasingly fawning.

By the time Woodward published an account in 2000 of Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan, his apotheosis from muckraker to cheerleader was complete. *Maestro: Greenspan's Fed and the American Boom*

Bush at War
By Bob Woodward
Simon & Schuster
376 pages, \$28

first casualty is truth. Purporting to get inside the minds of President George W. Bush and his closest associates—and to tell us the ultimate truths about the "war on terrorism"—Woodward instead creates a clever fiction that obscures truth and elevates myth to the status of revelation.

Woodward's betrayal of his journalistic duty—so common these days among his colleagues—would be ordinary and unworthy of comment were it not for his status as the dean of American investigative reporters. Woodward is an icon, and he remains influential, admired across the political spectrum, for his tenacity and stubborn



appeared almost simultaneously with the collapse of the Internet bubble and the outbreak of global economic crisis. Both developments threaten to ruin Greenspan's reputation for economic wisdom—and highlight the reinvention of Woodward as publicist.

In *Bush at War*, Woodward again shows his flair for public relations. Woodward makes much of his sources, boasting of an "inside account, largely the story as the insiders saw it, heard it

Once a stubborn muckraker, Bob Woodward has gone to war—and cemented his new role as flattering publicist.

and lived it." This "inside" account relies chiefly on self-serving recollections of the chief participants (Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice) and sanitized transcripts of meetings in which the main players sound like they're playing to a televised audience rather than speaking to each other.

"I'm doing a press conference tonight," Bush declares at the start of one meeting, according to Woodward. After descriptions of dozens of similar set pieces, Woodward comments that Bush in his private meetings does seem to be speaking in media-bites rather than to his comrades, which suggests that he should have titled his book *Bush at Meetings*. Woodward is more likely to tell us what the president is wearing, or who is present (or absent) at meetings, than tackle the big questions that remain unanswered about September 11 and the official U.S. reaction.

Absent from the book, for instance, is any mention of how and why, seven days after the 9/11 attacks, Bush organized the removal from the United States of dozens of bin Laden's relatives on behalf of friends in Saudi Arabia, without even assessing whether these Saudis might assist in the U.S. investigation. To quote

Frank Rich of the *New York Times*, who listed a number of Woodward's omissions in a recent column: "The truly sensitive issues for the Bush administration are those that are given short shrift in the book or left out entirely. We hear no inside accounts of its failure to track down the anthrax terrorists. John Ashcroft's inability to arrest a single terrorist during his post-9/11 mass roundups goes unnoticed."

Oddly, the strongest parts of *Bush at War* take place on the ground in Afghanistan. Woodward intersperses his account of Washington meetings with the exploits of the first CIA team sent into Taliban territory. The team, code-named Jawbreaker, is shown handing out cash to Afghan warlords. Woodward remains uncritical of these CIA agents, and of the Pentagon Special Forces units who later join them. He ends the book with a strange image of a group of them creating a 9/11 memorial in the Afghan mountains. One of the Americans vows, "We will export death and violence to the four corners of the earth in defense of our great nation."

The declaration rings false, as does Bush's imitation, throughout the book, of a lone gunslinger who intends to clean up the Wild West. Despite all the war-mongering rhetoric, Bush and his administration have actually failed to meet fire with fire; bin Laden and his top lieutenants have largely escaped U.S. wrath. Characteristically, Woodward says little about the setbacks in the war on terrorism, but he cannot completely erase from view the evidence that Bush and his cohorts view September 11 as a boon: an opportunity to extend American military power and ignite a new phase of U.S. imperialism.

The president's smug confidence that the United States can and will police the world obscures but does not eliminate from Woodward's account (largely in the form of Colin Powell's forebodings) that the source of global resentment toward the United States is rooted, in large measure, in U.S. policies and practices.

But Woodward can be excused for failing to grasp the seeds that doom American imperialism to failure. He has become, after all, a novelist rather than a journalist, and a poor one at that. ■

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Hip Hop Hysteria

By Salim Muwakkil

Serious social critics could once dismiss hip hop's purveyors as a bunch of crude vulgarians extolling ghetto-centric lifestyles. No longer. Hip hop has become one of the most influential U.S. cultural exports. In virtually every city on the planet, there are hip hop communities that not only have adopted the percussion-heavy music and spoken-word vocals, but have appropriated the sartorial and attitudinal style of the black and Latino youth who created the genre.

Perhaps the most exportable aspect of hip hop is its existential sensibility—its celebration of place, despite limitations. With verbal dexterity, hip hop's creators transformed themselves from ghetto dwellers into esteemed characters involved in complex narratives. Hip hop infused their neighborhoods with cultural currency and mythical resonance. If not a Shangri-La, then at least a "Shaolin"—the name the Wu-Tang Clan conferred on their poverty-ridden neighborhood on New York's Staten Island. Hip hop culture renamed and reimagined.

Some 25 years after its birth, the genre has become a \$5 billion industry but remains troubled at home. Beset by a growing chorus of critics who charge that its glorification of the "Thug Life" promotes misogyny, violence and crime, hip hop's advocates are on the defensive. This is not a new position; since its emergence from the ghettos of New York City in the late '70s, many mainstream critics have deemed hip hop a dysfunctional element of pop culture—a soundtrack for sociopaths. The violent murders of some of hip hop's most popular artists give its detractors a powerful argument.

A dedication to authenticity, or "keeping it real," is an important value that requires hip hop artists to stay close to the fears and aspirations of the community that birthed them. But since murder remains the leading cause of death for young black men, hip hop may be keeping things a bit too real.

Commercial motives have warped and corrupted the genre. The record industry uses personal rivalries between

rappers as marketing tools to ratchet up sales. Rap "beefs" may reap profits, but they also wreak havoc. Carlton "Chuck D" Ridenhour, frontman of the influential group Public Enemy, blames the East Coast-West Coast beef that virtually paralyzed the rap world in the mid-'90s on a "climate of violence" perpetrated by the record industry. "I think the culture has been mishandled by putting out violence," he told *Newsday* following the October murder of Jason "Jam Master Jay" Mizell of Run-DMC in his Queens studio.



Most famously, many attribute the unsolved 1996 murders of two of hip hop's most iconic rappers, Tupac Shakur and Christopher "the Notorious B.I.G." Wallace, to a feud between rival record labels. In a two-part September series in the *Los Angeles Times*, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Chuck Philips provided ammunition for those who link the murderous scenarios of many rap lyrics to the lifestyles of its major players. He reported that Shakur's killer is a gang member whom the rapper had assaulted in Las Vegas earlier that night. More explosively, Philips

claims that Wallace paid a bounty for the hit and supplied the murder weapon.

But Philips' conclusions are disputed in *Biggie and Tupac*, a new documentary by Nick Broomfield. The film, based heavily on a book by Randall Sullivan called *Labyrinth*, points to Marion "Suge" Knight, CEO of Death Row Records (recently renamed Tha Row Records), as the guiding hand behind both murders. Broomfield and Sullivan speculate that Knight ordered the killings because Shakur was going to sue Death Row for unpaid royalties, and Wallace's death would make the first murder look like part of the bicoastal rap feud.

Like Sullivan's book, much of the film is based on the allegations of former L.A. police detective Russell Poole, who says he was discouraged from following solid leads on the case because they pointed to police involvement. One of the most provocative aspects of Broomfield's film is the allegation from Wallace's mother that the FBI had both rappers under surveillance at the time of their murders. "It surprised me that Biggie and Tupac had been under surveillance for so long—for months, particularly in Biggie's case," Broomfield told the *Village Voice* in September. "He wasn't considered a political person, but he and Tupac and rappers in general were regarded by the FBI as focal points of potential political unrest."

Some claim that federal forces are instigating hip hop beefs in the same way COINTELPRO operatives kept militant black organizations at each other's throats during the '60s. "The only way to get to the top and bottom of both murders is to find out once and for all what the U.S. government knows about them," writes Cedric Muhammad of Blackelectorate.com, a Web site that has featured several articles alleging a COINTELPRO-style campaign is in play against rappers.

The *New York Times* revealed the existence of a special NYPD unit designed to focus specifically on the hip hop industry, investigating violence and other crimes and consulting with "detectives who do similar work in places like California and Florida."

The FBI is investigating whether Jam Master Jay's murder is linked to organized crime, reports the Ananova.com news service, and "federal authorities say several unnamed stars from the rap industry are under the microscope for possible criminal conspiracies."

If the FBI is indeed sowing the seeds of division, the hip hop community is fertile soil. Though these murders provoked temporary spasms of remorse and public gestures of self-reflection, little seems to have changed in the brutal, materialistic core of rap culture.

Ironically, one of the most socially conscious corners of hip hop is now coming under increased scrutiny from federal authorities because of alleged ties between the "Beltway snipers" and an Islamic group known as the Five Percenters. Certain phrases and symbols used by sniper suspects John Muhammad and Lee Boyd are common jargon of the group.

Known as the "Nation of Gods and Earths" to insiders, the Five Percenters were founded in New York by Clarence "13X" Smith in 1964. Smith, a migrant from Danville, Virginia, had joined the Nation of Islam during the heyday of Malcolm X and rose to become an official at the NOI's Harlem Temple. He was excommunicated in 1964 and quickly formed his own organization based on aspects of NOI philosophy. Smith later assumed the name "Father Allah" and set up shop in Harlem, where he taught for five years until he was murdered (theories have linked both the NOI and the NYPD to his killing).

Smith's esoteric street science revolves around the notion that the universe operates by mathematical principles, and that the key to success (both personal and collective) is understanding them. Once a man achieved mastery of self, he became a God, the "sole controller" of his destiny. (Five Percenters refer to men as "Gods" and women as "Earths.") The group's name derives from a belief that 85 percent of humanity is bent on self-destruction due to ignorance of their own divinity. The next 10 percent have self-knowledge, but use it to exploit and manipulate the 85 percent; they are referred to as the "blood-suckers of the poor." The remaining 5 percent are those "poor righteous teachers" who have self-knowledge (that is, they are aware of the divinity at the core of their identity) and teach "freedom, justice and equality to all the human family." Much like the Nation of Islam, Five Percenters place a strong emphasis on family, education and self-reliance. Although the doctrine lacks the NOI's restrictions on intoxicants, it extols self-control and forbids "uncivilized" behavior.

Some of hip hop's most important innovators are Five Percenters: Rakim (whom some still consider hip hop's best lyricist) is a member, as are rappers Nas and Busta Rhymes and singer Erykah Badu. Numerous rap groups, including Brand Nubian, Gang Starr, Mobb Deep and the Wu-Tang Clan, are also affiliated. Much of the hip hop vocabulary ("word is bond," "represent," "show and prove," "dropping science," "cipher," "seeds," and "G") is rooted in Five Percent ideology.

Ted Swedenburg, a University of Arkansas anthropologist who has studied the Nation of Islam and its offshoots for many years, has compared today's "Islamic

If the FBI is sowing the seeds of division, the hip hop community is fertile soil.

rap" to the the spread of Afrocentric ideas during the days of Marcus Garvey and Noble Drew Ali in the early 20th century. But through music, the Five Percenters' influence has been much greater. "What is interesting here is the fact that these heretical, esoteric teachings have been propelled, from their heretofore obscured places of origin, to the center of global culture," Swedenburg wrote in a 1997 paper titled "Islam in the Mix: Lessons of the Five Percent."

But with greater visibility comes increased scrutiny. Corrections departments in New Jersey and South Carolina have labeled the group a "security threat" and treat it like a gang. There are several court challenges to that designation, but as long as the group clings to its black nationalist doctrine, there's little chance that its public image will be altered. What's more, since there is no stringent membership process, some may use the group's ideology to perpetrate, and even justify, illegal acts. The Five Percenters' race-themed gnosticism also is interpreted as black supremacy by some followers, which further taints the group. The alleged connection to the Beltway snipers is sure to increase the scapegoating.

Although black nationalist ideas form a strong part of hip hop's foundation, today's most influential rapper may be a white man. White rappers have always had some input in the culture, from the Beastie

Boys and Third Base to House of Pain and, most infamously, Vanilla Ice. But Marshall "Eminem" Mathers has become the genre's bestselling artist in history.

White artists historically have benefited from expropriating African-American art forms and, in that sense, Eminem simply conforms to that traditional pattern. But unlike many of his predecessors, he is recognized for his mastery of the form. He initially gained fame—and respect—in the non-commercial precincts of the hip hop underground, where lyrical complexity and rhythmic flow are the highest values. Hip hop fans generally applaud his rapping talent, and they don't begrudge his mainstream success.

Eminem, rumored to be a choice for *Time's* "Man of the Year," also has been acclaimed for his acting debut in the movie *8 Mile*. His cinematic persona is attractive for many of the same reasons he is such a successful recording artist. He projects an image of vulnerability and authenticity at the same time. Instead of emulating the thematic threads favored by black rappers, Eminem crafts lyrics from his own personal history. His forthright way of confronting the "white Negro" conundrum has won both white and black fans. He adapted hip hop's celebration of situation to the trailer park and found success.

Although his rise to fame repeats a traditional pattern, it also exhibits major differences. He was "discovered," cultivated and tutored by Andre "Dr. Dre" Young, a successful African-American rap producer. Eminem also remains respectful to the African-American culture that inspired him and has devoted considerable resources to assisting the black rappers who supported him during leaner times in his Detroit hometown.

The Eminem saga is yet another lesson about the potential power of hip hop. Like the legion of other whites, Asians and Latinos who embrace hip hop, Eminem has a relationship with black culture that is so far removed from racist traditions that it creates new possibilities. That's the promise of hip hop: creating new possibilities.

This musical genre dreamed up on the streets of New York has become one of the planet's most powerful—and enthusiastically embraced—forces of globalization. If hip hop's originators can harness just a portion of the genre's creative power to address the issues that uniquely beset them, hip hop can redeem its promise. ■

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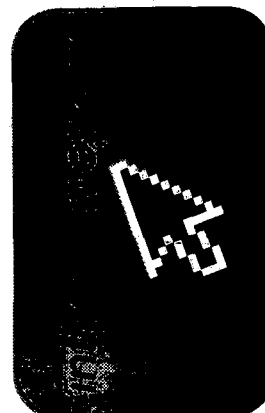
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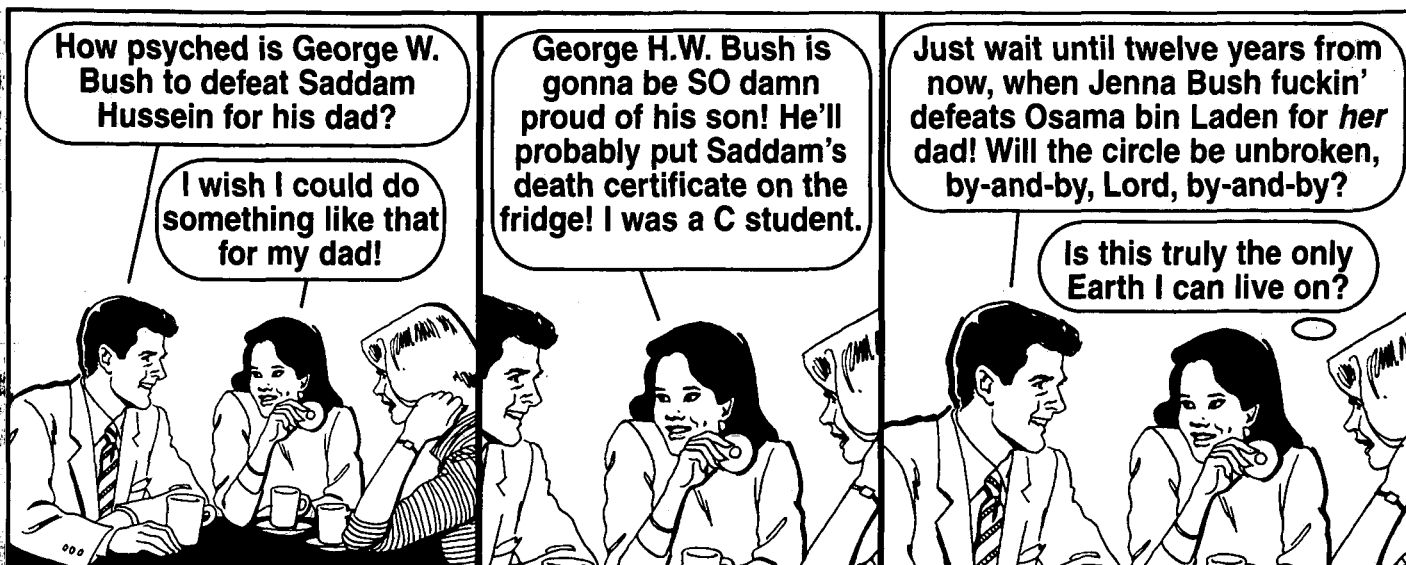
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continued from back cover

That first night I did the strip, I was thinking to myself, "O.K., when I was in high school, my friends and I would play our little punk rock music and sing and yell about Ronald Reagan. But if there has ever been a time in my life to create something about what is happening in the world, now is that time."

What kind of stuff had you been doing before?

Just totally, apolitical, absurdist, profanity-laden, crazy clip-art comics that don't have anything to do with reality whatsoever. *Get Your War On* kept the profanity and the clip-art imagery, but I wanted to focus on what I felt were screamingly obvious truths and just express them as directly and with as much force as I could.

So after the comics went online, how long did it take before more than the dozen people you e-mailed the link were looking at the site?

Probably three or four days. I still have the bar graph that I printed out from my Web host that week. When you look at that graph, it's just flat and then it leaps up. It was like "600,000 hits today? How do I take it down? This is too much. Am I going to get bricks thrown through my window?"

It was crazy, just crazy. This was something that was so personal and dark, I couldn't believe so many people were getting something out of it. I got all these e-mails from people that were so personal and sincere and grateful. What I had to do was go through this shift in my mind where I said, "OK, this is no longer going to be private and personal. From now on, there is going to be an audience."

For me, this year has been a struggle between trying to do something that's very personal and yet knowing that a lot of people are looking to you to say what they're feeling—that's a lot of pressure.

When you say "a lot" of people, what's "a lot"?

It's really hard to tell. I got 25 million hits in the last year. But 25 million hits isn't 25 million people. It's probably more than a million visits to the Web site, but half those visits are probably me and my mom.

How did knowing that all of a sudden it wasn't just you and your mom looking at the site affect the actual process itself?

For a while I don't think it affected it much because the process itself—this rush of realizing I could say whatever I wanted, and I could make myself feel better by making this strip about how dark I had been feeling—was just so new and exciting. But after a while, I felt like the cathartic element was diminished. It was more about making another strip, so maybe I'd feel better, and a lot of other people would feel better, too.

I know they made me feel better. It felt like no one was saying the stuff you were saying. The mainstream media have become so neutered.

I don't think neutered is the right word. You watch CNN, and they have a huge fucking hard-on for a war with Iraq! But I know what you mean. Once I started the comic and people started reading it, I felt like, "What the fuck, I'll just keep saying it." The whole thing to me when I started making it was to read something that I wished somebody would write. And so last fall, it was like, "O.K., I'll say it." Like saying, "Dick Cheney, oil industry bitch motherfucker." It felt good.

You were saying it, but you were also able to say it in a way that exposed the absurdity of the situation.

Well, what else are you going to do, man? One of the reasons I made the strip is because people like [*Vanity Fair* editor] Graydon Carter would come out and say things like, "This is the end of irony, we're entering this new phase." They were so eager to tell us not only what was and was not appropriate in terms of a response to September 11, but what was and was not even possible. And that I found just so appalling, condescending and, frankly, un-American. I was like, "You think we can't make a joke about it or be ironic about it? Watch me, you assholes." ■

Daniel Sinker is the editor and founder of *Punk Planet* magazine. A longer version of this interview will appear in *Punk Planet* #54.



bombs away!

An interview with *Get Your War On* creator David Rees

By Daniel Sinker

It would be easy to get lofty when talking about David Rees' Web comic *Get Your War On*. It would be simple to say how it exposes the absurdity of the war on terror; how his stark, repetitive approach to the strip (it's all told using clip-art images) boils down the horror of the past year's news reports, and lets you laugh in the face of your own mortality. But it's way easier to cut to the chase and say this: *Get Your War On* is fucking funny.

"The best way to dominate a situation or to own it is to make a joke about it," Rees explains. "And not to make a joke about how Osama bin Laden has sex with a camel, because that joke is not funny. You have to really dig. You have to get dark."

The darkness that fuels *Get Your War On* (www.mnftiu.cc), which Rees has updated on a sporadic basis for more than a year now, is the darkness of today—of a time when you half-expect George W. Bush to "fuckin' rip his face off and it's gonna be Ming the Merciless up under there" or for Dick

Cheney to be "the last man walking the scorched, post-apocalyptic earth." And in exposing that darkness so directly, Rees makes it a little easier to bear.

I found it hard to do work about 9/11 and the war on terror. You not only did work, but downright hilarious work. How did you manage it?

I had to get this off my chest. Late one night I was going to update my Web site with the regular, apolitical comics, and it just struck me that I just couldn't continue with business as usual. Since I was sitting at my computer with the clip-art open, it was like, "Hell, I'll make the clip-art characters say what I'm actually feeling." It wasn't like I was sitting around thinking, "God, I have to come up with a really powerful anti-war tool." I'm not an activist. I'm not coming from that background. But after September 11, I really had to come to terms with my own death—what felt like an imminent death—because I live in New York City.